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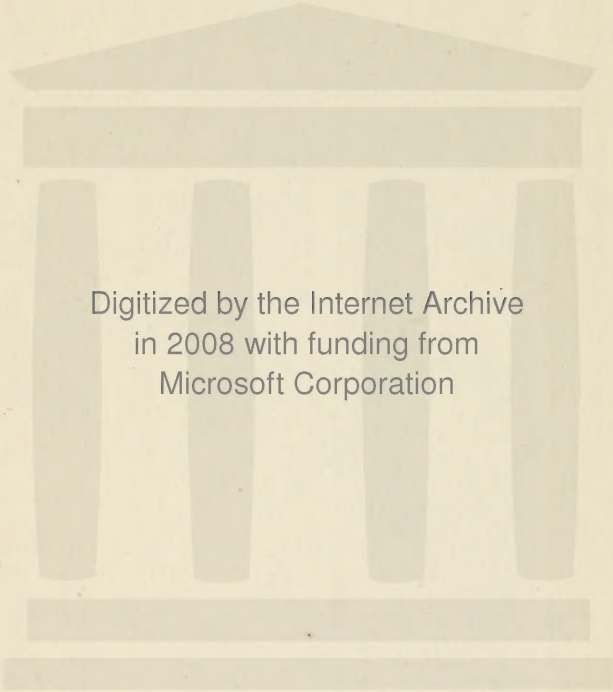

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# MIRABEAU

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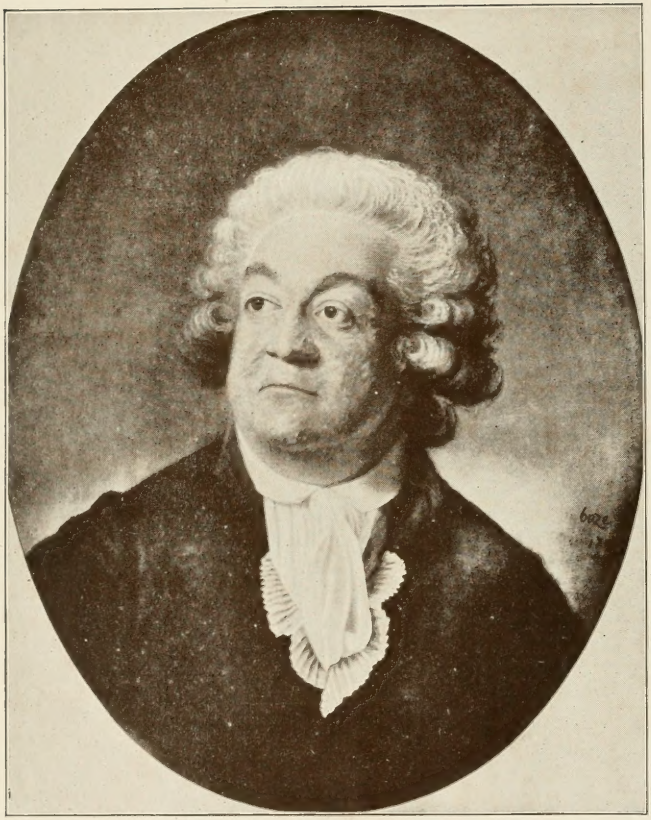


le Comte de Mirabeau

[*Frontispiece*

MIRABEAU IN 1789

(*From a pastel by Boze belonging to M. Henry Marcel*)

# Mirabeau

FROM THE FRENCH OF

LOUIS BARTHOU

PRIME MINISTER OF FRANCE

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# ORIGINS

# CHAPTER I

## THE FAMILY OF MIRABEAU

His ancestors—Jean-Antoine—Count Alexander—The Bailli—The *Ami des Hommes*, his life and writings—Family traits—The female line.

RENAN has said that during the Revolution the terrible gravity of events made ordinary men into men of genius for three months or a year. True as this remark may be in many cases, it is not applicable to Mirabeau. The Revolution found splendid employment for the exceptional gifts of the famous tribune; but had there been no Revolution he would still have been recognized as a great man. He came of a race of immemorial antiquity, whose qualities and whose defects alike culminated in him. He cannot be separated from his ancestry, and we cannot hope to understand him without at least some summary knowledge of the sources from which he sprang.

His father, the Marquis Victor Riqueti de Mirabeau, the author of the *Ami des Hommes,* from which he was nicknamed, claimed connection with a Ghibelline family, the Arrighetti, who were driven out of Florence in 1267 and 1268. Partial genealogists have more than once used the ever ready resources of their profession to create a foundation for this claim, but a strict examination of the documents makes it more than doubtful, and in all probability the question will never be settled.

On the other hand there is authentic evidence that one Pierre Riqueti was "created and elected" consul of Seyne, now the capital of a canton in the arrondissement of Digne, on January 26, 1346. This origin is less ancient

and less brilliant than that on which the Marquis de Mirabeau used to pride himself, but if it lacks other merits it has at least that of certainty.

The Riqueti family settled at Marseilles at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and there engaged in the coral trade and established a manufactory of scarlet cloth. In 1562 Jean Riqueti was elected first consul of Marseilles. "It was there," says the Marquis, this time with truth, "that our family was really illustrious, for its distinction was founded on public utility." It appears, indeed, that Jean Riqueti acquired both a great reputation and a great fortune. He married Marguerite de Glandèves, who belonged to the old Provençal nobility, and in 1570 he bought the lands and the castle of Mirabeau, situated on the Durance. On September 27, 1620, his grandson, Thomas, made an even more brilliant marriage with "the lady Anne de Pontèves, legitimate and natural daughter of the late illustrious Seigneur Messire Pompée de Pontèves, some time Seigneur de Buoulx, captain of fifty men-at-arms." In 1660 he received the young Louis XV at his house, and Letters Patent of the month of July 1685 raised the lands of Mirabeau to the dignity of a Marquisate.

The son of Thomas, Honoré III, soldier, scholar and administrator, played an important part at Aix as first procurator of the Marseilles district, which as delegate he represented at Court. He died in 1687, and it was in his son Jean-Antoine that the family of Riqueti de Mirabeau produced its first characteristic type. Mirabeau describes this Jean-Antoine, his grandfather, as "impressing every one by his reputation, his services, his haughty and noble bearing, his rapid eloquence, his proud humour, his qualities, his virtues and even his defects."

Jean-Antoine was born on September 29, 1666, and passed his childhood at the Château of Mirabeau, where he was privately educated. He was tall, well built and

handsome, generous and brave, and before he was eighteen he was placed in the Corps of Musketeers, in which he remained four years. His gallantry and his great love for his profession led him constantly to the wars. In 1696 he had the command of an infantry regiment, which he kept admirably in hand by his activity, firmness and even-handed justice. He was more affable to the humble than conciliatory with the great, and was a man of independent character and ready repartee. Humorous and also terrible sayings of his are quoted, which (as he was no courtier) did not advance his fortunes. The Duc de Vendôme, displeased with some exceedingly sharp answer which he seems to have made to Louis XIV, said to him, "Henceforth I shall present you to the enemy, but never again to the King."

Against the enemy at Chiari, at Luzzara, at Mantua he was always first in the field, exposing his great frame to every danger, and much less careful of his own life than of those of his men. In 1705 at Cassano he disputed, pistol in hand, with one of his friends the honour of defending a bridge whose strategic importance was decisive against the advance of Prince Eugene. A bullet having broken his right arm he tried to use an axe with his left, but a musket-ball cut the sinews of his neck and also the jugular vein. He fell and was left for dead, his body serving as a stepping-stone for the enemy. When he spoke of Cassano in after years he used to say, "That was the affair in which I was killed." He survived indeed, but by no means unscathed, for he never recovered the use of his right arm, and as the result of an operation, the boldness of which astonished the people of those days, he had to wear a silver collar to support his head.

His military career was thus interrupted when he was forty. Inaction was burdensome, and he married. Neither his character, which was impetuous and violent, nor his infirmities seemed to indicate the choice of a young wife.

Yet it was a young, noble and beautiful lady that he married. While taking the waters at Digne, where he was nursing his wounds in 1706, he met Mlle. de Castellane, whose physical attractions no less than her goodness and dignity made a deep impression on him. He tried, in a strange fashion, to secure her hand without her parents' knowledge. This odd proceeding, which was intended to hasten matters, delayed the marriage, which did not take place until two years later, when Mlle. de Castellane was twenty-three. She knew how to give way to the humours of a husband whose character had been exacerbated by suffering. "Ah, madame!" she said one day to a friend who had presumed to pity her, "if you only knew what a happiness it is to be able to respect one's husband"; and she forgot neither the respect she owed to him nor that which she owed to herself.

The regiment having been sold, Jean-Antoine retired to his castle of Mirabeau, where, with his wife's assistance and not without violence, he tried to put his estates in order. His brother-in-law failed in the execution of an order, and the system he established cost him a hundred thousand crowns. This loss, which reduced the family from embarrassment to poverty, was bravely borne. They retired to Aix, and after a time entirely redeemed their fortunes by order and economy. Jean-Antoine died on May 27, 1737, in his seventy-first year, honoured and regretted even by those who had suffered under his masterful temper. His wife survived until 1769.

There were seven children of the marriage of Jean-Antoine Riqueti and Françoise de Castellane. Four of these died before their father: three sons survived him. Their education had been very severe. They had never dared to "worship their father to his face," nor had they ever any prolonged conversation with him. They were so afraid of him that his letters, which he used to dictate to his wife, made their hearts beat faster. "I never had

the honour," wrote his eldest son, "of touching the flesh of this venerable man, who was essentially a good father, but whose dignity restrained the goodness which was ever present but never visible." It may not be too much to say that this was a particular case of a general scheme of education. The severity which kept at a distance the expressions of filial tenderness proceeded from Jean-Antoine's exceptional temperament. His sons were not so well armed against the vicissitudes of life.

All three had been made Knights of Malta while still boys. The youngest, Alexandre-Louis, had the shortest but not the least romantic career. His "impetuous eccentricities," as his brother called them, though characteristic of the family, were not such as could be recalled with pleasure. After serving under Vauvenargues he was promoted to the rank of captain in the King's regiment, and was present at the battles of Dettingen, Fontenoy, Lawfeld and Raucoux, and at the sieges of Namur, Ypres and Furnes. Like his father he was a gallant soldier. But the "lively passions" which Vauvenargues had detected in him hurried him into an intrigue with a certain Mlle. Navarre, mistress of Marshal Saxe (among others), and in 1747, at the age of twenty-three, he married her. This union scandalized his family, but did not last long. He lost his wife in 1749, but was not reconciled with his relatives, who could not forgive his having married beneath him. In 1755, however, he gained the favour of the Margravine of Bayreuth, sister of Frederick the Great, who happened to be passing through Avignon, and who made him her Grand Chamberlain and Privy Councillor. First the King of Prussia and then the Margravine sent him on missions to the Court of France. This unexpected greatness conciliated his brothers, but nothing could satisfy his mother short of a second marriage which would enable her to forget the first. He accordingly took as his second wife the Countess von Kunsberg, on whom the

Margravine conferred a dowry as a reward for his services. This alliance repaired his credit, but brought him only a few months of happiness, for he died in July 1761, less than a year after the wedding. His wife, "the little Countess," went to live with her mother-in-law, by whom she was adored, and on whom she lavished a devoted affection in the terrible trials which afflicted her old age. The Countess died in 1772.

This uncle of Mirabeau played no part in the life of the tribune, unless it were by example, and I have, therefore, passed rapidly over his career, though it is by no means without interest. The other son of Jean-Antoine, known as "the Bailli," concerns us much more directly. He was the second in order of birth, and lived from 1717 to 1794. In his long career, which was honourable, and even glorious, he did not perhaps obtain all the prizes which his services deserved, but his only real misfortunes were the misfortunes of his family, and of these he had more than his share.

At thirteen years of age he entered the corps attached to the King's Galleys, and had a precocious youth. At fifteen, according to his own account, he had "already gone the devil of a pace," and the phrase must be construed in its fullest sense. It would have mattered little if he had merely sown his wild oats, but he was fond of brandy, and his excesses often landed him in prison. When he was eighteen he cured himself of this horrible vice by a deliberate effort of his powerful will, and thereafter hardly a year of his life passed without a campaign. He was twice wounded, and once made prisoner by the English, and one by one he rose through all the ranks of the service. In 1751 he was a post-captain and the author of numerous memoirs. In 1752 he was made governor of Guadeloupe, where almost every public department was under his control. The gallant sailor was also a wise administrator, and he tells us that he was "loved a little,

esteemed a good deal, and feared even more." It is clear that those who feared him most were the rogues, who were numerous and rapacious, and who were powerless in presence of his uncompromising honesty. Slavery was repugnant to his humane sentiments, and ideas of this kind, which were hostile to so many interests, some of them illicit, made him anything but a favourite with the bureaucracy, against which he maintained a struggle entirely to the credit of his courage and his integrity.

He returned to France for reasons of health in 1755, and resumed active service in the following year, when he was wounded at the siege of Mahon. His experience and his services justified his ambition, and even his expectation, of becoming Minister of Marine. On two occasions, in 1757 and 1758, the patronage of Madame de Pompadour seemed on the point of realizing his hopes. But the heroic admiral was a bad courtier; he had inherited from his father a contempt not only for death, but also for intrigue, and the Ministry of Marine escaped him. Other employment, however, was found for his exceptional qualities. From 1758 till 1761, under Marshal de Belle-Isle, he was Inspector-General of the Coast-guard of Saintonge, Picardy, Normandy and Brittany. During the Seven Years' War this post was no sinecure. The Minister of War, who had appointed him, found him invaluable. At St. Malo, at Saint Cast, at Havre he rendered the greatest possible services against the English, for whom he had no love, and whom "he was accustomed to regard as the enemies of the human race." A letter from his elder brother, dated December 16, 1760, in the following terms, brought him back to Paris: "My dear brother, I am about to be arrested; as it is by order of the King we have nothing to say . . ."

This brother was two years his elder, and he was on terms of the closest affection with him. The younger, as

became a man of spirit and high integrity, performed the duties imposed by the laws of primogeniture with loyalty and devotion. He regarded his brother as the head of the family, to whom he "left the charge of his business affairs." Even in matters concerning himself and his own career he asked and took his advice. They were usually far from each other, and they constantly exchanged long letters (more than four thousand are extant), in which they discussed all manner of topics. There are few instances of correspondence so varied in interest and so vivacious. There is a whole world of ideas in the letters which the brothers wrote to each other, and in order to understand them we must go back a little, and study in the Marquis de Mirabeau what would have been the strangest figure in the Riqueti family, had not the Marquis himself had a son whose glory, whose genius and whose vices surpass and efface all that his "unbridled race" had produced before him.

Victor de Riqueti, father of the Tribune, was born on October 5, 1715, in the small town of Pertuis in Provence, where his mother had gone (as she went in the case of her two subsequent children) for her confinement. At three years of age he was made a Knight of Malta. It is not clear whether he had his first schooling at Aix or at Marseilles. But in any case, in accordance with the family tradition, his education was not prolonged, for at the age of fourteen he entered the army as an ensign. His father, in a somewhat brusque leave-taking, advised him to be good in order to be happy; but his life, in the course of which he was neither the one nor the other, was not in harmony with this prudent counsel. After two years with his regiment he was sent to the "Academy" at Paris, where he became "the head of a band of worthless young men." He was regular in his work, but excesses, which he himself

THE CHÂTEAU AND VILLAGE OF MIRABEAU IN PROVENCE

*(From a photograph supplied by M. Maurice Barrès)*

describes as "amazing," undermined his health and exhausted his resources. His father turned a deaf ear to all financial appeals, and by the paternal order he joined Duras's regiment at Besançon, with the rank of captain. He saw some active service, made some unsuccessful appearances at Versailles, contracted some debts, was wounded, wearied of a profession in which he was a failure, and, in order to quit it with honour, sent in his papers on March 7, 1743.

The labours of authorship suited him better than the profession of arms. In 1737, and perhaps even earlier, he had taken up political economy, and had written copiously. It was about this time that he made the acquaintance of Vauvenargues, an officer like himself and a distant relative. Vauvenargues soon diagnosed his character. "You, my dear Mirabeau," he wrote, "are of an ardent, melancholy temper, prouder, more restless, more unstable than the sea, with a sovereign insatiability for pleasure, knowledge and glory." In this sentence there is a complete portrait, and it may not be premature to say that the Marquis's son was destined to resemble it very closely. It may be added that the Marquis de Mirabeau had as just an idea of Vauvenargues as the latter had of him; so much so that in his letters he actually reveals to his friend his true talent, and promises him reputation in the "republic of letters," if he will only display strength, accuracy and depth of thought. He encourages and stimulates the moralist, and reproaches him with affectionate insistence for allowing the gifts and the genius lavished on him by nature to remain hidden. As for himself, devoured, as he confesses he is, by the ambition to make his name, to be "somebody," he seeks in literature a consolation for the disappointments of his military life. He writes verse and prose, he composes portraits in the manner of La Bruyère; he researches and collaborates with Le Franc de Pompignan in the *Voyage de Languedoc et de Provence,* written in 1740, and he

interests himself in agricultural questions because "a philosopher ought to end there."

Meanwhile, while awaiting the hour of this philosophic termination, the Marquis de Mirabeau turned his thoughts to marriage. At the age of twenty-five he confessed that "pleasure had become the executioner of his imagination," and that "immorality was for him a second nature." This confidence, addressed to Vauvenargues, was, it is true, accompanied by the hope that women would after a time cease to occupy "the smallest corner" in his life. He may have thought that in 1743 that time had come. At any rate he was a man of agreeable presence, sufficient fortune, and a high-sounding name; he was twenty-eight years of age and free from military service, and he made up his mind to marry. The net revenue left to him by his father may be estimated at 16,000 livres. In 1740 he had bought the estate of Le Bignon in the Gâtinais, ten leagues from Sens, and two years later a "corpse of a house" in the Rue Bergère at Paris.

Being thus provided with a town house and a country seat, he looked for a wife, and found one in 1743 in the Vassan family. M. de Vassan was the son of a president of the Chambre des Comptes of Paris; he came from the Soissonais and had married the daughter of the Marquis de Sauvebœuf, who, in addition to property in Périgord and in Poitou, had brought him the barony of Pierre-Buffière, near Limoges. Of this marriage was born a daughter, Marie-Geneviève. In 1743 she was seventeen and already a widow, though her first marriage had been a marriage only in name. The Marquis de Mirabeau did not know this young lady, but he asked for and obtained her hand. As it was not, therefore, her personal charms which influenced him, one would naturally have supposed that it must have been her money, were it not known that the marriage contract gave Mlle. de Vassan only 4000 livres of dowry, and also that her mother reserved to

herself the free disposal of her immense fortune. The Marquis was, it would seem, content with expectations.

The marriage took place at the Château d'Aigueperse, near Limoges. Its financial advantages were doubtful, and were not compensated by the attractions of the lady. Mlle. de Vassan was neither beautiful nor ugly. She did not altogether lack humour, but she had no serious interests. Her character was harsh, difficult and irritable. She was, in fact, a futile, unstable and petulant person, who discharged her household duties without either ability or charm. In all she did she was shiftless and unsystematic, and there was a certain slovenliness in her manners (not to call it by a worse name) which was quite out of harmony with her birth and station. With all this she was very exacting, and her jealousy was so easily aroused that there were constant tearful scenes, followed by "consolatory negotiations."

The Marquis's friends were amazed that he should have married a woman whose absurdities could not fail to be an obstacle to his career and a hindrance to his legitimate ambitions. After his very first interview with her the Bailli came to the conclusion that "the girl was not fit to be seen anywhere." Her husband, however, continued to put up with her. To his wife's turbulent affection he opposed a kind of patient resignation which was rather good nature than love. Ill-assorted as their union was, it was for a time comparatively peaceful, and in eleven years eleven children were born to them, of whom only five survived.

The Marquis divided his time between the management of his estates and the study of political economy. In 1747 he wrote a *Political Testament,* which was never printed. Its central idea, surrounded as it is by many oddities, seems to be the reconstruction of a kind of feudal aristocracy, rejuvenated and fortified by the development of the powers of local authorities and the magisterial privileges of the nobility. In 1750 he published, but did not sign, a *Memoir on the utility of the Provincial States in relation*

*to the Royal Authority*. The mere title of this piece implies a whole programme, the boldness of which led d'Argenson to attribute the anonymous pamphlet to the Président de Montesquieu. I will only quote one passage from this essay, but it is worth remembering. The Marquis de Mirabeau reviews the organization of the States in the different provinces, and pauses at the States of Languedoc, the law and constitution of which he prefers above the rest. There the three orders met every three years and sat together. The representatives of the *tiers état,* however, in numbers equalled those of the two others put together, and votes went by counting heads. The Marquis thinks that this arrangement is only fair to the *tiers état,* "for it is they who support the greater part of the burden." Forty years later this assertion found a startling echo in the passionate eloquence of his son at the *Jeu de Paume*.

The publication, in 1756, of *L'Ami des Hommes, a Treatise on Population,* brought the Marquis both fame and popularity. The book excited real enthusiasm in its day, and, though it is now no longer read, it would be unjust not to recognize the originality of some of its ideas. It was the Marquis de Mirabeau who first proposed the creation of a Ministry of Agriculture. He pronounces in favour of Free Trade. He thinks that wealth is unfairly divided, and, using a formula picturesque in its audacity, he goes so far as to write that "great fortunes in a State are like pike in a fishpond." Our author, active and enterprising, even adventurous, has no love for unearned increment. He denounces *rentiers* as "eating the bread of idleness," and attributes to this class almost all the ills which afflict society. Among his paradoxes and his outbursts, his obscurities and his hesitations, he hits on profound truths and real anticipations of the future. At a later date, when he had come to know Quesnay, he said that he had stated the problem of population wrongly, and apologized

for "putting the cart before the horse." None the less he was right when he advocated the foundation of a large number of institutions in which unmarried mothers might place their children and have them brought up, and also when he went further and claimed that if such a mother is in poor circumstances "she should receive on leaving the hospital the sum of ten crowns for the present which she has made to the State." He anticipates *Émile* in arguing strongly for mothers nursing their own children. "If I were master," he wrote, "I should augment by law the dower of every mother who had herself given suck to her children." The desertion of the countryside strikes him as a social evil. "We are leaving the hamlets for the villages, the villages for the towns, the towns for the capital. This is what happens to every nation unless the government takes care to give it an impulse in the contrary direction." He hates war and slavery; he preaches the fraternity of nations. True, he is too much of an aristocrat, too proud of his race and too much attached to his rights to conclude in favour of the equality of all citizens; but we must give him credit for "giving place with silent respect to a water-carrier because the poor man carries a burden, and enduring the contact of a beggar whose evil odour and ragged garments reproach me with a misconception of fraternity." Thirty years later his son, engaged in a fierce polemic against a powerful company, was to become in fact the champion of the water-carrier.

The following phrase is often quoted from the *Ami des Hommes* because it has been regarded as a prophecy of the Revolution: "Those who do not see the danger are very blind: it is close upon us." I do not underrate the gravity of such a warning, but it would be wrong to exaggerate the importance which the author intended to give to it. The chief defect of the *Ami des Hommes,* and, I believe, the chief reason for the neglect which has overtaken it, is indeed the absence of any doctrine which is at once precise,

logical and complete. The book is well filled and luxuriant; it contains many views but no system. The system did not come till later, and then it was borrowed from Dr. Quesnay, physician to Mme. de Pompadour, who imposed his principles on the Marquis de Mirabeau.

Quesnay had just published in the *Encyclopédie* two articles on "Farmers" and "Grain," certain new agricultural ideas which were in harmony with those of the *Ami des Hommes*. Dr. Quesnay, a frank, free-thinking, obstinate, independent and industrious person, was sixty-two and a skilful surgeon. He occupied a set of apartments above those of Mme. de Pompadour, who was amused by the gaiety and originality of her doctor, and often went to see him. If we may believe Marmontel's *Memoirs,* she used frequently to meet there d'Alembert, Diderot, Turgot, Helvetius and Buffon. With such visitors, it may easily be imagined what an intellectual laboratory Dr. Quesnay's apartments became. They talked of many things at these gatherings: it would be more correct to say that they talked of everything; and the doctor was not inferior in powers of thought to any of his distinguished friends. He had a doctrine, and even a system, in which everything had its place. He was country bred, and had a strong taste for country questions. According to him, all things useful to mankind are products of the earth. Industry may transform them and commerce may transport them, but agricultural labour alone can directly create riches. The earth by its natural fertility gives to the cultivator a surplus exceeding the worth of their labour and expenditure which constitutes a "net product." This "net product" was the basis of all Quesnay's teaching. From it followed consequences of the greatest importance in fiscal, economic and social science. In order to explain these and to convince him of their truth, Quesnay invited the Marquis de Mirabeau to come and see him.

The first interview irritated the *Ami des Hommes;* the second was sufficient to convince and conquer him. "The principles of my science," he wrote in later days to Jean Jacques Rousseau, "are not my own. I was over forty when I adopted them, and before I did so I had, at the cost of my self-esteem, to disavow the work to which I owe my celebrity and my public reputation. I had to bow my head under the crooked talons of a man who, of all others, was antipathetic to my own beloved natural exuberance, who was a most bitter controversialist and a most implacable opponent, and who was armed with the most cutting and scornful satire." The tone of this confession in itself shows how complete the conquest effected by "the monkey" Quesnay must have been. Before he met the doctor the author of the *Ami des Hommes* may have thought himself a master, afterwards he resigned himself to being merely a pupil.

It was under the influence of the "tenacious doctor" that the Marquis de Mirabeau published his *Theory of Taxation,* which appeared in December 1760. He knew well how daring the book was, and he suspected that he ran some personal risk. "It will be a miracle," he said, "if it all passes off as quietly as heretofore." There was reason for his uneasiness. The opening sentence struck the dominant note of the book: it was a terrible reproach. "Sir, you have twenty millions of men, more or less, who are your subjects. These men all have some money: almost all are capable of the kind of service your Majesty requires of them. And yet it is found impossible to obtain service without money or to obtain money to pay for service. This means, in plain language, that your people are unconsciously withdrawing themselves from you. The will of the people indeed is still attached to your Majesty's person, which they distinguish from the agents of your authority, though they do not dare to say so in this craven age. Your power is nothing but the union of the will of a

strong and active multitude with your will: a disjunction of these wills would cut at the root of your power. That is the evil and the source thereof."

When a man addresses his king in such terms it is difficult to be less audacious towards the agents of the Royal power. The Marquis de Mirabeau did not spare them. His attacks on abuses roused more rancour than his teaching, though his teaching was bold enough. Taxation according to him was only a tribute voluntarily granted by the king's subjects, adjusted and collected by the provincial states which, according to him, should be established everywhere for that purpose. It was, however, his proposal to abolish the contract system which struck the deadliest blow at the farmers-general, whose activities he denounced as inimical to the national life. Their retort was not long in coming. On December 16, the Marquis de Mirabeau was arrested and committed to the Château of Vincennes. The rejoicings of his enemies were short lived. His friends were deeply moved, and agitated in his favour: the King yielded. On December 24, the Marquis left his prison, but was ordered to betake himself to his estate of Le Bignon.

This was exile, but in spite of the winter weather he did not at first complain much of his fate. Mme. de Mirabeau accompanied him, but she was not his consolation. With his wife went a lady of their acquaintance, "one of those women who do their sex the greatest honour, alike by the extent and solidity of their attainments and the goodness of their hearts." When the Marquis described his fair friend in these terms to Mme. de Rochefort he did not add that she was thirty years of age, good-looking, witty and fascinating. Her name was Mme. de Pailly; she was the wife of an elderly Swiss officer of Lausanne, from whom she usually lived apart. The Marquis had known her for some years, and she was congenial to Mme. de Mirabeau, of whom so far she does not appear to have been a rival.

The time, however, was at hand when Mme. de Pailly was to take openly in M. de Mirabeau's life the place which she retained until his death, and which had been abandoned or inadequately filled by his lawful wife.

For two years things had been amiss between the spouses, who had ceased even to keep up appearances. In July 1758, the Marquis was already railing against his wife, who complained (rather vaguely) that she was denied her conjugal rights, and who demanded that a certain servant should be dismissed. As the Marquise disliked his house so much, he declared in favour of "a settlement without a scandal," the basis of which was to be that her property should be returned, and that she should go back to her mother on condition that she should "make some contribution to the maintenance and education of her children." It was to be an amicable separation. The Marquis, whose patience was at an end, adapted himself without difficulty to the new situation. "Cato," he said, "sent away his wife, and when his friends came with their 'ifs' and 'buts' he pointed to his shoe. 'It is well made,' said he, 'but it pinches, and none of you can know where.' I shall not send away my wife, but if she dismisses me I shall accept that as final, depend upon it." Since his exile at Le Bignon, where the Marquise had joined him, it does not appear that anything remarkable had happened. Two years later, in 1762, Mme. de Vassan fell ill and her daughter went to stay with her in the Limousin. She summoned her husband, "who, whatever may happen, will be dear to her till her dying day." The Marquis went without haste, but failed to induce either the mother or the daughter to accept the proposals of separation which he submitted. It was at this moment that certain documents came into his possession which showed beyond all doubt that the Marquise had been guilty of misconduct. This was "a dunghill which a decent man could not be expected to cover with his mantle." The

wretched woman had not only had a lover; with a refinement of vice due, it must be supposed, to a special degree of infatuation, she had handed that lover a certificate of her guilt. Thus armed against his wife the Marquis ordered her to remain in Limousin. She defended herself feebly, so feebly that her denials amounted almost to a confession. She undertook never to return to Paris, on condition that the Marquis made her an allowance of two thousand crowns net, payable quarterly to agents nominated by her. A month later, on March 3, 1763, the Marquis agreed to this plan, which well suited his own views, and in conversation with Mme. de Vassan he even agreed to increase his wife's allowance to 10,000 crowns in the event of his mother-in-law's death. Thus in August 1763 the separation of the couple was completely and amicably settled.

I have hitherto said nothing of the children of this strange household. There were five, the eldest of whom was a girl of eighteen. It is to her that her mother alludes in one of her letters when she says, "I have a positive duty to perform. I wish to see my daughter before she becomes a nun. I ought to see her, I wish to test her vocation, by my words, my fears, and my arguments. An irrevocable decision of this kind cannot be too carefully scrutinized." Nothing came of the maternal wishes: the daughter took the veil at the convent of the Dominican Sisters of Montargis on March 13, 1763; she was subject to attacks of insanity. There were two other girls, aged respectively sixteen and eleven. The former married the Marquis du Saillant, in November 1763, the latter at the age of seventeen became the wife of the Marquis de Cabris in 1769.

There were two boys, the elder of whom, Honoré-Gabriel, was fourteen at the time of his parents' separation. The other, André-Boniface-Louis, was nine, and was the youngest of the whole family.

In a letter of April 1, 1762, the Marquise de Mirabeau writes from the Limousin about "something very advantageous for one of my daughters which must not be missed." On February 3, 1763, she said, "They wish to separate me from my children, they do not wish them to become fond of me—I hope that they are sufficiently well bred not to neglect me, and I do not wish to owe them anything which their goodness of heart is not willing to grant."

When she spoke like this, neither she nor her husband was under any illusion. She had never been able to do anything to gain or preserve her children's affection. She had been an idle and a frivolous mother, entirely under her husband's domination, and had taken no part in their education. She had delegated the duty of bringing up her daughters to the convent of Montargis, from which they passed without transition into married life. Her direct concern with the upbringing of her sons was of course even less. The influence she did exert upon them was that of her temperament, and this was unfortunately undeniable and should be borne in mind by any one who wishes to understand some of the less praiseworthy of the actions of the most famous of the two.

More than any great man, Mirabeau owed his qualities and his defects, his virtues and his vices to the stock from which he sprang. His life and his genius, his prodigious greatness and his lamentable weaknesses, everything in his eventful career will remain an irritating enigma to all those who do not connect him with the line of his ancestors. Apart from them, and without them, nothing is comprehensible. With them and through them everything, or nearly everything, is clear. I will, therefore, summarize the leading family characteristics.

In the first place there was an exceptional aptitude for the military profession; the Riquetis de Mirabeau were a race of soldiers. Without going further back than the first years of the seventeenth century we find Thomas, son

of Honoré II, making for himself a brilliant reputation in the Italian wars. Of his six sons the four youngest were made Knights of Malta before they came of age; all were fighters more or less. Honoré III, before he gained by his civic virtues the surname of the Solomon of his country, had borne arms in Italy, in Catalonia, at Lerida. It was the same with his brothers, one of whom after being a captain in the French Galleys became inspector, another a post-captain, took part in the war against Spain, while a third held letters of marque against the Turks. Bruno, who survived them, served in the Guards, was present at thirty sieges and received seventeen wounds. Jean-Antoine, whose heroic gallantry I have described, was their nephew, and I have referred to the military services of the Marquis de Mirabeau on land and of his brother the Bailli on the sea.

All the Mirabeaus had wit and *verve,* ready tongues and a taste for adventure. They were sensitive, by no means long suffering, ready with a word or a blow. Their courage was often foolhardy, their tempers often violent, and some of them had so little self-mastery that they might almost be called insane. Of Bruno, who was one of this type, the Marquis de Mirabeau observed, "it is all very well to be a little mad, but he is three-quarters out of his mind." He was not altogether a lunatic, however, for the Maréchal de Vauban was his friend, and when some expressed astonishment he observed, "this lunatic has qualities not to be found among the sane." The same remark applies to other members of the family, as will be seen.

Finally this "tempestuous race" (as the Marquis de Mirabeau called it) was, especially in its last generation, above all things amorous, the sport and victim of strong passions. We have seen that the Bailli himself had spent his youth in terrible excesses. He was able to reform, but others of his own generation and later did not try to do so.

As to their wives, the family boasted that among their

ancestresses was Sibylle de Fos, of the House of the Counts of Provence, celebrated by the troubadours for her grace and her talents, but they produced no proof of this. The ladies who are known, the Glandèves, the Pontèves, the Rochemores were of good blood, women of sound intelligence and pious character. Anne de Pontèves, anticipated at the holy water font by another woman, gave her a box on the ear, saying, "Here, as in the army, the baggage comes behind." Mme. de Sévigné appreciated Élisabeth de Rochemore. As regards their morals there is nothing to show that these were defective, but I should not suppress the fact that the wife of Jean-Antoine, that is to say the grandmother of Mirabeau, after an irreproachable life sank in her eightieth year into a horrible form of dementia, characterized by outbursts of violently obscene talk. As for Mirabeau's mother, I have said enough to show that her aberrations had not the excuse of old age, and that they were not limited to her conversation.

Such, in broad outline, is the lineage of the man who was on occasion to fall so low and to rise so high. We now come to Mirabeau himself, and it is our task to give a complete picture of him in all his terrifying and seductive complexity.

# BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY YEARS

Childhood and education of Mirabeau—In the Army—At Aix, Le Bignon and Paris—His marriage with Mlle. de Marignane—His debts—His adventure at Grasse.

Gabriel-Honoré Riqueti de Mirabeau was born at Le Bignon on March 9, 1749, having already two teeth. He was a large, fat, child of unusual strength. At three years of age he used to fight and struggle with his nurse. At this time he had an attack of small-pox, and was the victim of an imprudent course of treatment applied by his mother, the result of which was that his face remained seamed and scarred till the end of his days. This ugliness, in painful contrast with the normal beauty of his race, displeased and irritated his father and became the initial cause of his severity towards his son. The boy's education was entrusted to one Poisson, a learned and intelligent person who afterwards became the Marquis's land-agent. Poisson carefully cultivated his pupil's intelligence, but took too much pains to curb his terrible exuberance. Gabriel was a great reader and an indefatigable questioner, and by the time he was five his knowledge was remarkable. But he was also very pert and troublesome, ill-disciplined, talkative, and vivacious in a way that revealed a surprising precocity. He was always being punished. "I might say," he wrote in after years to his father, "that since my earliest childhood, and my first steps in the world, I have received few proofs of your kindness, that you treated me harshly before I could possibly have deserved it. And yet you should have seen at a very early stage that this method

excited my temper instead of repressing it, that it was as easy to soften as to irritate me, and that the first course was for my good while the second was not."

In spite of this it was no other than the *Ami des Hommes* himself who had proclaimed the principle that "in every case without exception, coercive measures are those best fitted to produce on a man the effect the most contrary to their object." He was visibly disconcerted by his son. He thought him "fantastic, headstrong, and difficult to get on with, ill-inclined, an untidy braggart, an amazing compound of badness and commonness." At the same time he could not but see in him "sense and talent, a bold heart under his pinafore, an intelligence, a power of memory and a vivacity which are startling, surprising, positively alarming." Sometimes the child "promises to do very well," sometimes "he will never be more than the quarter of a man, if indeed he is anything at all." Were these judgments really as contradictory as they sound and are they to be attributed to the capriciousness and irritability of the Marquis's temper? On the whole I do not think so. When Mirabeau reached man's estate there was in him the same contrast of qualities and defects that his father saw in him when he was a child. The pitiless rigidity and narrowness of the education inflicted on Gabriel condemned him to alternations of hypocrisy and rebellion. His son's growing ugliness more and more irritated the Marquis, who was less inclined to praise in him the family virtues than to detect "the vile qualities of his mother's family." This attitude of mind was not likely to make for kindness.

At the age of fifteen, the boy, who was outgrowing Poisson, was entrusted to a friend of the family, the "honest and romantic" Sigrais, an old officer whom he immediately conquered by his wit, his memory, and his good heart. This experiment, which his father considered too gentle, was given up after a few months. Gabriel,

now styled Pierre-Buffière from his mother's estate in Limousin, entered a military establishment in Paris kept by the Abbé Choquard in May 1764. Some indiscretion which he committed there induced the Marquis to send him to a house of correction, from which he was delivered by a deputation of his comrades armed with a "large paper of petitions signed by them all." Already he was exercising that power of irresistible fascination which, during the whole of his tempestuous life, was to be one of the secrets of his tremendous influence. The superiority of his intellect and talents was becoming strikingly apparent. He learned all there was to learn at the pension Choquard, ancient and modern languages, mathematics for which he had a special aptitude, also music (he had an admirable voice) and drawing, accomplishments which were to be his recreations in prison.

After he had finished his course at school, the time came when a decision had to be taken. The Marquis still complained of his son's headstrong and disobedient temper, and, faithful to the educational plan which he had laid down, thought only of "changing the leading-strings." He wanted "rather a rough school" and a "strong hand" for his son, and so he sent him to the Marquis de Lambert, a well-known martinet, who was in command of the Berri cavalry regiment at Saintes, where Mirabeau duly reported himself on July 19, 1767. The Marquis de Lambert was wont to say that it fortified a man's lungs if he was compelled to breathe nothing but honour. Mirabeau was not at all averse from the proposed discipline; he thought himself a born warrior; and in fact the experiment for a time seemed to succeed well enough. But hardly a year had elapsed when, in consequence of losses at play and some other peccadilloes, he ran away from his regiment and took refuge with the Duc de Nivernais in Paris. According to him, his colonel had twice grossly insulted him, the cause being, if Gabriel's account may be believed, a love affair

in which he had supplanted his superior officer. His brother-in-law, the Marquis du Saillant, intervened; the affair was settled and Mirabeau escaped the severe punishment to which he had exposed himself. He could not, however, expect to escape scot free. His father, always inclined to violent courses, thought for a moment of sending him to the Dutch colonies, but ended by "caging" him in the island of Ré, the citadel of which was under the command of the Bailli d'Aulan. The latter was soon under the fascination of his prisoner, to whom he allowed special privileges, and who managed to persuade him to intercede for the revocation of the *lettre de cachet*.

When this had been granted, Pierre-Buffière (for so he was still styled) joined the infantry legion of Lorraine under the command of Colonel de Viomesnil and was allowed to take part in the expedition to Corsica. Passing through Rochelle he had a duel with an officer which he had afterwards cause to regret, having been, as he said, more fortunate than he deserved. He embarked at Toulon on April 16, 1769. The expedition was short, but long enough to enable the young sub-lieutenant to prove his military capacity to the satisfaction of his chiefs. From Corsica, too, he brought back materials for a history of the island which was never written. His father was all but won over by these proofs of courage, industry and intelligence, and wrote to his brother: "As to talent and cleverness, he is perhaps unique. His brain is active: he works eight hours a day. But heaven knows what sort of a figure he will present." The Bailli was the first to see what figure his nephew made. Pierre-Buffière landed at Toulon on March 8, 1770, and six days later, paid a surprise visit to his uncle at the Château de Mirabeau. The Bailli was charmed and much affected by this attention, and warmly welcomed the prodigal. He thought him ugly, but "behind the scars of the small-pox, and the great change in his appearance he has something

refined, graceful and noble." The conquest as usual was complete. In his letters to his brother the Bailli does not stint his praises. This youth of twenty-two "astonishes you by a world of thoughts and ideas, some of them very original, which his brain grinds out like a mill." With all his faults of exuberance and presumption natural at his age, his uncle thinks him upright and kindly, high-souled, and in truth a "genius" who (if he is not merely a skilled dissembler) will be "the fittest man in Europe to be a general or an admiral, a minister, a chancellor, or pope, or anything else he likes."

He did, as a matter of fact, what he liked. He studied the lands of Mirabeau, drew up plans for dealing with the disastrous floods of the Durance, went shooting with the estate servants, who loved him, took notes and laboured in the fields with the peasants, who adored him. Every one who saw him came under the sway of his charm. He established an ascendency over the Abbé Castagny, a distinguished agriculturist, who had been the Marquis's man of business, and whose chief delight it was to collect the favourable opinions of his favourite expressed by the officers of the Lorraine Legion, who were in barracks at Pont-Saint-Esprit. These praises were transmitted by the Bailli with untiring enthusiasm and solicitude, but they were received with obstinate incredulity by his father. The Marquis attributed them to his son's plausibility, to his presumption, to what he calls his "imperturbable audacity." For his part he will not be convinced so easily; it would not do to allow this romantic ne'er-do-well, who had turned his uncle's head, to be out of leading-strings yet awhile. Let him read the *Economics* and the first two years of the *Ephémérides du citoyen,* in which is given the clarified essence of the ancient constitutions. Let him study also the *Catéchisme Économique* and the preface to the *Précis des élémens,* the most elaborate of the works produced by his father

in spite of his ill-health! He was determined to make a country gentleman of the ardent and impetuous young man, who wanted to be a soldier, or, rather, a sailor, for in the latter trade there was an opening for everybody's talents.

Without taking a side the Bailli did his best to persuade his terrible brother, if not to be indulgent at least to "diminish the tension," and to relax a little the pressure of his sceptical and yet severe discipline. His own old method of correcting the faults of a young man consisted less in violent collisions with his inclinations, than in leading him insensibly to reflections and to seeing for himself the falsity of his calculations. On this subject he made in passing the really profound observation that "men never reform, except according to their own ideas." He went so far as to say that he would be glad to keep his nephew with him in order that he might complete his own education by his society. Nevertheless, having made sufficient trial of Gabriel's good disposition, he hastened to send him off to his father, whose good influence would correct his errors. The Marquis consented to receive his son, who arrived at Aigueperse in September 1770, and was received (so, at least, his father says) "kindly and even tenderly." He watched him closely, and lavished his advice and guidance. Though "his grotesque features often blunted" his father's eloquence, he "addressed him seriously on all subjects, sometimes kindly, sometimes severely." These lessons were well received by "M. le Comte de la Bourrasque," who (whether sincerely or otherwise) appeared desirous of turning over a new leaf. All his relations were soon reconciled to him, and approached the head of the family with a view to persuading him to restore to Gabriel his proper name and title. The Marquis was softened and gave way, and Pierre-Buffière again became the Comte Gabriel-Honoré Riqueti de Mirabeau.

The family to which he was thus restored was deeply

divided. The Marquis and his wife had been separated since 1762. Mme. de Pailly, a lady of wit and intelligence, but an intriguing person, who had for long been the Marquis's mistress, lived close by. The bad health of Mme. de Vassan, the Marquise's mother, pointed to her speedy departure. Her fortune was enormous, and she kept making and remaking her will. Who was to be the ultimate beneficiary? Among the relatives, whose private misunderstandings had been aggravated by pecuniary difficulties, the children took sides. Mme. du Saillant was for her father, Mme. de Cabris took her mother's part. Mirabeau, who "thus began with the thorny side of family life," was employed by the Marquis to negotiate. He escorted his mother to the bedside of Mme. de Vassan, who died on November 4, 1770.

The will, owing to its contradictory provisions, opened a series of new difficulties and lawsuits, which poisoned the family atmosphere for more than ten years. The young Count was caught in these fatal complications, and never emerged from the entanglement. He employed his formidable debating talents sometimes on behalf of his mother, sometimes on behalf of his father. Each of them experienced in turn his co-operation or his hostility. Gabriel throughout his life was destined to help without scruple and without restraint those whom he felt he could use most effectively for his own purposes. Against his father he used the most scandalous excesses of language, sparing neither his literary reputation, the dignity of his private life, or even his financial and domestic honesty. It was the Marquis's own fault. He had excited his son against his mother, and had allowed him to speak of her in an improper and even outrageous manner. He had thus killed all sentiments of filial respect, and could no longer expect to receive it. It was again left to the good Bailli to tell him the truth, which he did when he wrote, "You must know that you should never speak to a son

about his mother without a certain respect." Unfortunately in this violent and unbridled family respect was lost for ever.

The Marquis was better advised when he associated the young Count with himself in the management of his estate in the Limousin. The country was devastated by famine. Mirabeau did his best to deal with it, not only by giving assistance, but by relief works. He lived in the midst of the peasants, ate with them, encouraged them and supported them both with his words and with his presence. In this way he gained their confidence. Under the influence of his father, who was always anxious to be doing something, he devoted himself to the establishment of a "Court of Husbandry," whose business it was to settle by the judgment of popularly elected arbitrators the disputes and differences of opinion arising in each parish. The object of the institution was "to avoid lawsuits, which are both costly and destructive of harmony. . . . Most of these cases," he said, "are mere misunderstandings, which in their early stages could easily be settled by a just man with a cool head." Is it not curious that these words could have been said towards the end of 1770, and that the author of the *Ami des Hommes,* this time really justifying his title, should have instituted a sort of elective tribunal resembling both our justices of the peace and our *Conseils de prud'hommes?* Mirabeau took the thing seriously. His suppleness, his shrewdness, his frankness and his activity triumphed over all difficulties, so said the Marquis, who thought the enterprise impossible. Every one was induced to co-operate, the clergy, the tenants, and the landlords.

This "glutton of the impossible" succeeded by his charm, by an innate and incomparable gift of pleasing, persuading, convincing, dominating all those with whom he came in contact. He found employment for these qualities at Paris, where his father let him come in

February 1771, though he had sworn not to let any of his sons set foot in the capital before they reached the age of twenty-five. "I am overwhelmed with kindness," wrote Gabriel to his brother-in-law, the Marquis du Saillant, "and I see that for the time being I have quite regained my father's affection." He appears to have made another conquest besides that of his father. "I hope to bring your wife's friend over to our side. She has the wit of five thousand devils, or angels, as you please, and she put me quite at my ease, much to my profit and pleasure." In later days he was to use very different language in speaking of Mme. de Pailly! Meanwhile he pays calls, sees the Maréchal de Broglie, the Duc d'Orléans, the Prince de Condé, the Carignans, the Noailles, and Mme. Elisabeth, then six years old, who naïvely asked whether he had been inoculated. He proved himself an insinuating person, who took the colour of his company. He astonished people by his ugliness, and disconcerted them by his manners, but he had too much wit and too much audacity not to please.

In January 1771 his father had procured him a captain's commission in the dragoons; but as he thought this occupation "out of date," and as, moreover, his son was not on the active list, he did his best, but without success, to get him other employment. The young man threw himself on the libraries, where he worked with demoniacal energy in company with Gebelin the economist and the poet Lefranc de Pompignan. He spent the summer in the Limousin, where he was passionately interested and absorbed in his country duties; from thence he went to Le Bignon, and finally returned to Paris, where he complains of troubles that disturbed his life there. His father, "having been influenced against him, contrary to his real opinion," changed his attitude, called his son "a muddler and a spendthrift," and complained of "his indecent indiscretion and chatter." Mme. de Pailly's hostility had something to do with this.

The Marquis, in fact, was tired of his son, and in December 1771 sent him away to Provence where he was charged to reduce to order the peasantry, among whom a recent regulation on the subject of wood and pasture had caused some "popular outbursts." The Count discharged his mission in circumstances about which it is difficult to obtain any clear information. The testimony, all of which is interested, is contradictory. On the one hand Mirabeau is represented as haughty, threatening and brutal, even to violence. Other witnesses praise his gentleness and dignity. The Abbé Castagny, in a letter to the Marquis, declares that "he has made himself loved by every one." He adds, "He is quick, but he has a good heart. He wishes to crush down all resistance, yet he pardons at the first word. This is the turning-point in his life. If they take to him the thing is done." The portrait is incomplete, but the likeness is undeniable.

What, however, was "the turning-point" to which the good abbé refers? I doubt very much whether he foresaw by a gift of prophecy, which would have really been miraculous, the part which Mirabeau was destined to play in Provence. Does he allude to the Count's projected marriage with Mlle. de Marignane, whose fortune of not less than five hundred thousand francs was attracting many high-born suitors? This had been talked of when he came back from Corsica. It was a scheme of the Bailli de Mirabeau; but another plan (itself afterwards abandoned) had set it aside. "Do not regret this," wrote Mme. de Cabris to her brother, "her face is hideous, and she is very small." Was this unsparing portrait true to life? Emilie de Marignane was certainly not pretty, but her eyes, which were very black and very fine, animated her rather heavy face with a certain brightness and tenderness. Her hair was abundant, her teeth white, her mouth inclined to smiles and laughter; her chin was round and thick, and her figure drooped too much to one side. The

first impression she produced was not favourable. She had the pertness of a monkey, but the Marquis, who was of this opinion, mitigated his condemnation a little by saying that she was "a melodious monkey." She had indeed an admirable voice, which she used with much skill. Was it this gift (which he shared) that attracted Mirabeau? This would be to judge too ill or perhaps too well of him. It was not the young lady but her fortune which interested him. She had been ill brought up by her father, who apart from his wife lived a dissipated, distracted and frivolous life. She was in reality rather shy, more malicious than intelligent, more sensible than passionate, and in fact entirely unsuited to him. She had neither the qualities nor the defects which were necessary to control his mind, or his heart, or his Herculean temperament. He himself felt, and said, that he was "too mad," that his flight was too high and too unequal for her.

Perhaps, too, he only married her out of pique at a sharp saying of his father, who had been irritated by his unsuccessful wooings, and in order to spite his rivals. These were both numerous and important. There were M. de la Valette, the Marquis de Grammont, the Vicomte de Chabrillant, the Marquis de Caumont, and M. d'Albertas. Mirabeau re-entered the contest, and soon drove all other competitors from the field, and compromised the young lady by manœuvres rendered all the easier because she was only too ready to give them her countenance. It was useless for the Marquis de Marignane to say to her, "I do not want M. de Mirabeau, and you shall not have him." He was obliged to yield and to rejoice in a union which, "so to speak, incorporated his family in one of those which are most highly respected in the country."

The *Ami des Hommes,* for his part, also practised the virtue of resignation. He had taken the line of complete disinterestedness, and had affected to know nothing about it. They wanted his son: he gave but did not offer him,

still less did he guarantee him. It was as if he knew nothing about him. Nor did he leave him at Aix, a town about the size of a snuff-box, where they might all have seen and appreciated and judged him at their leisure, and taken him, if they wanted, just as he was. A week before the wedding he wrote to his prospective daughter-in-law. After declaring, very untruthfully, that he ardently desired the honour and happiness of being allied to her, he added: "My son has his defects; no one knows them better, no one feels, and will feel them, perhaps, more than his father. But he has a good warm heart—aye, a noble heart, though he is imperious and spoiled by pride: in a word, he is my son, and some day you will know what that means. . . . I shall never forget that it is to you alone that I owe the advantages which are now conferred upon him. No doubt I should have left him under the eyes of your respected relatives at the time when they were good enough to think of allying themselves with him. It was for them to judge him, for such an engagement is so serious that it is impossible to wish any one to be deceived about it. But I was not unaware of the danger of such a long stay, of the imprudence of youth, the fatigue which in the end is caused by an impetuous character, the ill-nature of neighbours, the disadvantages which arise from the separation of the chief parties interested. I felt the peril of all this, and also that it was necessarily increased by the impossibility of my fulfilling the expectations which his boastful character could not fail to have aroused. I saw and felt all these difficulties, and I also clearly perceived that it was you alone who surmounted them. Once you had made up your mind after serious consideration, you prevailed upon the best of fathers, swept aside a passing dislike, and gave the help that was necessary to my son's protectors. It was you, Mademoiselle, who was in question, and it was you who gave yourself. . . ."

It is not surprising that, as the Marquis was animated

THE COMTESSE DE MIRABEAU

(*From a pastel belonging to M. de Montvalon*)

by sentiments such as these, he did not take part in the wedding festivities. The Bailli also absented himself, but was afterwards very sorry for it. Some years later these defections suggested to Mirabeau a reflection the truth of which can scarcely be contested. "Neither the Marquis nor his brother," he wrote, "nor any of the older generation took the trouble to preside over a marriage by which the eldest son of their house was allying himself to one of the richest heiresses in the kingdom." The absence of the Marquise de Mirabeau, who had been separated from her husband for ten years, is less difficult to explain. The Marquis had written to his son in the postscript to a letter of May 9, 1772: "All things considered (and consideration is necessary), you must wait for your mother's consent, and not fail to show her proper consideration." I cannot say whether or in what way Mirabeau followed this excellent advice, the source of which placed its disinterestedness beyond question. It is, at any rate, certain that his mother did not sign the contract, and did not answer the letter in which her son announced his marriage.

The settlements offered by the Marquis de Mirabeau, according to Gabriel, were much inferior to what he had promised and to what was fitting in the circumstances. It must be remembered, however, that his financial position, however regarded, was neither clear nor brilliant. He made the Count an annual allowance of 6000 livres, which from 1773 was to be increased by annual increments of 500 livres to a maximum of 8500. M. de Marignane was even less generous, and, having regard to his fortune, much less to be excused. Out of a capital payable after his death and settled on his daughter, he advanced 8000 livres on account of her trousseau, and undertook to pay her, in lieu of interest, an annual sum of 7000 livres. The dowager Marquise de Marignane made over to her granddaughter a capital sum of 60,000 livres, which, however, she was not to enjoy until her grandmother's decease.

In return for a rent of 2400 francs the new establishment including servants and any children that might be born, was to be housed and maintained in her house at Aix.

Thus, without counting presents and brilliant but uncertain expectations, Mirabeau and his wife had at their disposal an income of 8000 francs. As the result of his former extravagances, and also of the expenses contingent on the marriage itself, he already owed about four times as much. His father contributed 200 crowns towards this, which, in view of the great expense incurred, was little enough, as his steward pointed out. Mirabeau made a clean breast of his financial position, first to his fiancée and then to his prospective father-in-law, and expressed a wish that the marriage might be celebrated at Marignane in order to reduce the cost. This did not suit the Marquis's vanity, though in the circumstances it cannot be denied that Mirabeau showed both prudence and frankness. He was quite aware of the true character of his position. He foresaw both the debts of the future—debts which would be born of the debts of the past—and "the thousand and one troubles" which would arise, both for his wife and himself, from a union founded on resources so much out of proportion to the exigencies of their social position. This marriage was the capital error from which sprang the embarrassments, the expedients, and the mistakes (some of which deserved, perhaps, a harsher name) of his troubled career.

According to the wish of the Marquis de Marignane, the marriage was solemnized at Aix on June 23, 1772, and the festivities lasted for a week. The expenses both for the bridegroom and for his father-in-law were very great. Mirabeau had to equip his wife, who had only one dress, make presents to her numerous friends, and to distribute largesse to the surrounding countryside. The income of the first year of his married life was insufficient to meet his expenditure, and also the interest on his old debts,

There was nothing for it but to contract new obligations. The young couple went to Marignane, where Mirabeau, exasperated by the difficulties of his position and anxious with good reason about the future, gave himself up to excesses and acts of violence which did not spare even his wife. At Tourves, in the house of the Comte de Valbelle, a friend of his father-in-law, where there was held a celebrated "court of love," formerly graced by Mlle. de Marignane, his conduct was scarcely more decent. It was clear that the marriage was not sufficient to appease the ardour of his temperament. At Mirabeau, where the newly-married pair made a solemn entry, it was impossible to be less liberal to the villagers from the country round the château than to those at Marignane. Instead of coming to his son's assistance, the Marquis, whose meanness astonished even his agent, charged him with a heavy bill for legal expenses. Later on he refused even to give his receipt, which by the terms of the contract was indispensable, for an advance which the Marquis de Marignane offered to make to his son-in-law.

The situation grew worse and worse. "In order to repair one breach," wrote Mirabeau, "it is necessary to make ten new ones. It is incredible how rapidly the swarm gathers." The swarm continually increased, so much so that Mirabeau soon gave up the unequal struggle. To live in the present, to stifle his memory of the past, and to turn away his eyes from the future, this, by his own confession, was the course of conduct he pursued, and it was, in fact, a kind of delirium. He doubled and tripled the number of his wife's diamonds, he insisted on her wearing "charming clothes," he carried out alterations at the castle, where he kept open house, and multiplied his charities and his largesses. This mad career of prodigality had in his eyes the excuse that, as he did not gamble, and as his debts were not due to immorality, he had no creditors but "Jews, workmen, booksellers or artists." Whatever their profes-

sion, however, they were creditors none the less, who cried out when they were not paid. It was vain for the Count to try to smother their complaints by beating them. Their grievances soon came to the ears of M. de Marignane and the Marquis de Mirabeau.

Something had to be done. In order to deliver his son from the insistence of his persecutors, most of whom were professional money-lenders, the Marquis solicited and obtained from the Duc de la Vrillière the "favour" of a *lettre de cachet*. An order from the King, dispatched on December 16, 1773, directed the Count not to leave the Château of Mirabeau. His wife, who had given birth to a son on October 8 at her father's house in Aix, came and joined him. It was a hard winter, but even more painful experiences awaited him in the following year. His debts amounted to a sum of between 180,000 and 200,000 livres, and his father secured that two further measures should successively be taken against him. In March 1774, he changed his place of exile; it was said that Gabriel was upsetting everything at Mirabeau, and he was compelled to take up his residence at the little town of Manosque. On June 8 of the same year the Marquis, after holding a family council, carefully "packed" by himself, induced the Lieutenant of the Châtelet to sentence him to deprivation of civil rights. This humiliating decision at least secured him comparative tranquillity, but, if we may believe Mirabeau, it was a terrible shock to him.

The Count had been overtaken by another misfortune some days previously. At Manosque he had been living with a family named Gassaud, who had been friends of his own relatives for some time, and he had discovered that the son of the house, who was in the musketeers, was much more intimate than he ought to have been with the Comtesse de Mirabeau. An intercepted letter had proved this beyond doubt, and the Countess herself confessed it. Mirabeau restrained himself. He yielded to the supplica-

tions of his wife, who was again about to become a mother, and to those of the musketeer's relations, and he forgave her. We must not, however, exaggerate his magnanimity on this occasion, for there was more than a little calculation in his attitude. No one who knew anything of him could doubt that there were grave faults on his side. Scarcely three months after his marriage he had written to his sister, Mme. du Saillant, "I am fat and well content, in spite of many exploits over which I draw a modest veil." These exploits and those which followed them perhaps palliated and excused the one *faux pas* of the Countess; but her husband's apparent generosity had other motives. He had everything to lose by taking action; by holding his tongue, on the other hand, he put his wife under an obligation which might be very useful to him later on. He made the Countess write—probably to his dictation—a letter to the musketeer, breaking off everything. He insisted on this letter being sent back, and he kept it. He announced his determination himself to the guilty lover in a grandiloquent and declamatory epistle full of violence, and so devoid of dignity and measure that it is irresistibly comic. It was, in fact, a farce, which we must believe amused Mirabeau as much as any one, little as such a supposition redounds to the credit of his good feeling.

He went so far as to arrange a marriage for his rival, whose engagement with the daughter of the Marquis de Tourettes had been broken off. The Marquis was a friend of Mirabeau, who did not wish to have the responsibility of the rupture. In order to effect a reconciliation he suddenly left Manosque and rode off to Les Tourettes, a distance of more than twenty leagues. This expedition might have passed unnoticed, or at any rate might have had no serious consequences, had it not been marked by an unforeseen incident.

On his return from Les Tourettes Mirabeau took a fancy to stop and pay a visit to his sister at Grasse, which was

at that time distracted by a public scandal. A certain rhymed broadside in honour of the ladies of Grasse—a stupid, coarse and obscene production—had been placarded on the doors of the most conspicuous houses and scattered broadcast. The design of this performance was attributed to Mme. de Cabris, and her husband was credited with its execution. Mirabeau's sister was a very pretty, seductive and passionate woman, with a powerful tongue. Her husband was an invalid, and was threatened with insanity, and she made no secret of her *liaison* with a certain M. de Jausserandy, Seigneur de Verdache, and Co-Seigneur de Briançon. In later days Mirabeau hated his sister like poison, but at this time he was much attached to her, and his imprudence was such that this had actually given rise to compromising insinuations. One of their relations, M. de Villeneuve, who had done his best to spread the most calumnious reports arising out of the affair of the broadside, happened by chance to meet Mirabeau on August 5 in company with his sister, dressed in male attire, and the inevitable Briançon. A collision was not long in coming. Mirabeau, excited at least as much by a copious dinner as by the desire to avenge his sister's honour, snatched M. de Villeneuve's umbrella, broke it across his back, and closed with his antagonist. He afterwards wrote that "this could bring him nothing but the esteem and sympathy of decent people." This is hardly true; M. de Villeneuve was fifty, he was twenty-five, and, even admitting the justice of the quarrel, the fight was not a fair one. M. de Villeneuve was disavowed by his family, whose honour required a very different expiation in a matter of this sort, and he brought a charge of assault with intent to murder against Mirabeau. On August 22 a warrant for his arrest was issued. He had already taken refuge at Manosque, well knowing that his father's anger at this escapade might have the gravest consequences. How was the danger to be averted? He thought of his

wife, who was on affectionate terms with her father-in-law, and (sometimes without her husband's knowledge) kept up a constant correspondence with him. Three months before the Villeneuve affair the Marquis had written to her: "My dear, my dearest daughter, every day I esteem you more and with more reason, apart altogether from the paternal tenderness which I have always had for you since your first letters. The last sentences of these are so well and so properly expressed, the thoughts are so wise that no one at any age could say anything better. Yes, my child, you are destined to be the point of union of two very honourable houses, and the prop and stay of their successors. You will fill the gap which must necessarily exist between the grandfather and the grandchildren, and you will fill it worthily. It shall not be my fault if all my mind and heart and all my experience are not placed at your disposal to enrich your excellent natural abilities. . . . Unlike Mme. de Cabris, your husband is not essentially wicked; indeed he is not wicked at all, for, though he is shameless, untruthful and irreligious, he is incapable of conspiring against me or even defying my authority in my own family. Though I have little hope, I am doing, and shall continue to do, all I can to save him yet again. . . . It is now most of all, my dear child, when both public and private censure are falling upon him, that your gentle and wise kindness, and the friendly and prudent common-sense of M. de Gassaud, must be relied on to melt the hardness which pride and madness have created in a heart not fundamentally bad." (April 20, 1774.)

It will be seen that Mirabeau was not ill inspired in entrusting his wife with the delicate task of probing the angry feelings of his father and averting their worst consequences. The Countess owed him too much not to do him a service, the trouble of which was lessened by the pleasure of seeing the country, and of making acquaintances inside her family which were not without interest for her. Le

Bignon was a great and pleasant domain. The Marquis, who had his poetic moments, described it very charmingly. "This expanse of greenery contains such a curious mixture of trees, thickets, water and tillage that you might say that it is a meeting-place for all the birds of the countryside." With the head of the family were there assembled the Bailli, the Marquis and the Marquise du Saillant, and Mme. de Pailly.

The presence and the attitude of the last-named caused Mirabeau some anxiety, and formed the subject of a letter which he wrote to his wife on September 10. The commencement of this letter, after some reproaches addressed to the Countess on the subject of her silence, reveals in him a paternal tenderness for which he deserves credit. "Your son is very well . . . he has been taken round all the good wives in the town, and his nurse is delighted beyond measure. It is curious how much he has grown and how clever he has become. He expresses everything with his little gestures, and he is marvellously quick. All the women are doing their best to spoil him, and I am quietly waiting my turn when he is out of the control of all these chattering creatures. You women arrogate to yourselves the exclusive charge of a boy's physical education in his early years, and Heaven knows whether you understand what you are about. I assure you I am not allowed to have any say in the matter. It is a slap here, a box on the ear there. They are all mothering him, and it is only in a doubtful sort of way that I am allowed to be called papa; for I have been convinced in spite of myself that Master Gogo pronounces this word perfectly. Heaven bless their ears!" He goes on to rejoice that his wife's journey has resulted in convincing his uncle that "he had not covered himself with disgrace because he had a scuffle with a gentleman." It was necessary for him to take that journey, and neither he nor his wife had had any reason to regret it. "There are things which all honourable men

feel in unison if their feelings can be harmonized at all, and, though you know how far I am from hoping ever to be in unison with my father and my uncle, I venture to think that I am second to none in this respect. A letter from an indiscreet friend, or a reckless, a malignant or a hypocritical person, finds credence easily; it is easy to believe the worst, I say, when the errors and passions of a young man have justly inspired distrust; but a personal explanation would efface the impression made by a hundred letters. Letters have no faces, and sooner or later a man's countenance reveals his soul. This very father, this very uncle, who could see nothing but unpardonable brutality and shocking want of self-control in the false version of the story, saw how honourable it was to me when they were better informed, and were all the more ready to take this view of the matter because at first they had been deeply grieved. The favourable judgment supplants the other, and indulgence gains the day. At the present moment, my dear, you have the matter by the right end. You may be sure that the two brothers will feel and think alike, and that they will have this form of pride more, perhaps, than anything else in the world, and that soon they will see, as they ought to see, that their name was more deeply concerned than I in this affair." (Unpublished letter, dated September 10, 1774.)

## CHAPTER III

### FROM THE CHÂTEAU D'IF TO THE CHÂTEAU DE JOUX

Mirabeau and his wife—His adventure at the Château d'If—Confinement in the Château de Joux—M. de Saint-Mauris—Complaints of the prisoner, his destitution, his visits to Pontarlier.

At the moment when Mirabeau was so strongly expressing his confidence in the future his fate had been decided. His flight from justice after the Grasse affair made a judicial settlement inevitable. To deliver his son from this, the Marquis informed his daughter-in-law that he had decided to apply to the Ministers for another *lettre de cachet*. He obtained it, as usual, with ease, and Mirabeau was brutally arrested, "like a pickpocket," at Manosque, and on September 20 was committed to the Château d'If in the roadstead of Marseilles. His father's intention was to leave him there under probation for some time and then, if the governor testified to his good conduct and "repentance," to have him transferred to some other fortress; "if he emerges from this trial a better man it will be a miracle. I shall have others ready for him, and so on by degrees. I owe no less patience to his position as a husband and a father." What did the Countess do to mitigate the terrors of this scheme of surveillance and reformation? The evasive tenderness of the letters which she wrote from Paris or Le Bignon does not show that she acted with much energy. Her husband begged her to come to him or to retire to her father's house at Aix, but she had no intention of rejoining her husband, and her excuses for not doing so irritated the Count and did not satisfy his curiosity. Finally she took offence at what she

called the "injustice" of her husband's tone, and gave up the vaguely skilful and prudent phrases at which she was an adept, simply alleging that she had her father's written order not to quit the roof of the Marquis de Mirabeau.

This time the captive in the Château d'If lost all patience and wrote: "You are a monster. You have shown my letters to my father. I will not ruin you as you deserve. My heart bleeds at the thought of sacrificing what I have loved so much, but I am not willing to be your dupe any longer, and I will not. Drag your disgrace where you will. Take your perfidy and duplicity further away from me, if possible, than you have done already. Farewell for ever." These terrible words have hitherto been given as a letter. In reality they are only a post-script. I have before me the whole letter, which is dated December 14, 1774, and is unpublished. All Mirabeau is in it—all his disconcerting and almost indefinable complexity, threatening and tender, domineering and ironical, abrupt and coaxing. It is worth while to quote the opening passage for the sake of its really striking rhetorical force. "Your first letter would be a cruel outrage if you had reflected on the force of what you were writing. Your father's ignorance of social and moral law does not surprise me; he has little intelligence, his heart is a weathercock; his opinions are never his own. My father's misunderstanding of that law is also not astonishing; it is not the first injustice which he has committed, owing to his prejudice against me. But ordinary common sense might teach you that the civil contract called marriage, entered into before all men and placed by its very nature under the guardianship of society, annuls all other engagements and cannot be subordinated to any other authority but that which itself confers. The whole world knows that a father has no rights over a married daughter without the consent and privity of her husband, even to repress the most scandalous and dishonourable excesses. And

even if all this were not the case your heart should have told you that no human authority but force could take you from under my protection, and that all advice tending to prevent you from coming to me to perform the duties of conjugal affection was cowardly, treacherous and contemptible advice, and that all authority exercised in this sense was usurped and tyrannous. Your heart should have told you that a woman owes to the father of her children, to the companion of her fortunes and of her life, beyond any other being, a tribute of tenderness and attention, and that she owes to no one but him, or, at any rate, to him before all others, what men call 'obedience.' You should, therefore, have told me of your father's so-called order, that I might be informed of it, but not in order to explain your conduct; for, I repeat, to say to your husband, 'I cannot come to see you, to help or to comfort you, although you urgently beg me to do so, because my father has forbidden me to stir from here,' is to offer him the most outrageous and unpardonable of insults."

In spite of his complaints at the end of this very letter of the nitrous air of the country, which does not agree with him, and of the food, which is very bad, Mirabeau had reason to be grateful for the kindness and attention which he received at the Château d'If. His wife had written to him, "Use, my dearest, that magic which is always at your disposal when you wish to enchant some one." He had "enchanted" the governor of the fortress, M. d'Allègre, and kept up a clandestine correspondence with his mother and his sister, Mme. de Cabris. To the latter he sent the wife of the canteen keeper, whom he had compromised. This facile affair left no remorse behind it. "There was only one woman at the Château d'If," he afterwards wrote to his father, "who had any resemblance to womankind. I was twenty-six. Was it a very grave crime in me to allow her to suppose that I thought her pretty?" This confession does not lack wit, and it must

be admitted that the record of Mirabeau's life might pass as irreproachable if it contained no worse episode than this youthful intrigue with the not too unkind canteen keeper of the Château d'If.

The Marquis had learned through an indiscretion of his second son Boniface of the relations which existed between his eldest son, his wife and his daughter. He feared what might come of a coalition so threatening to his interests, and this, even more than the favourable reports from the authorities at If and Marseilles on the prisoner's conduct, led him to decide on transferring his son "to a more suitable place," where he would enjoy a semi-liberty. From If Mirabeau was sent on May 25 to the Château de Joux near Pontarlier, and was placed in the custody of the governor, M. de Saint-Mauris, being his only prisoner. "Banished to a nest of owls in the land of the bears," he did not at first appear to find much amelioration in the change of which his father had made such a favour. His relations with his wife, whose excuses for not joining him were very maladroit, had become embittered. "I am willing to believe, madame," he wrote, "that you have not realized how infallibly you disgrace yourself by your proposal to go to your father and avoid me on my return. As on this occasion it will be impossible to attribute your behaviour to my misconduct, how do you suppose people will view your absence on the return of the unfortunate husband whom you have already abandoned? If you examine your own conscience, madame, you will be less distressed at what I have said than at the fact that you have given occasion for me to say it."

In this letter Mirabeau gives some curious details about his personal situation. "The only liberty I have is liberty to shoot, and I am in a country where there is no shooting. Even if there were, my legs are too full of gout to carry me. There is no town, none, at any rate, that I am allowed to visit, though it were only a quarter of a league

away. I have no society and no books, and in fact I have left one prison where my hardships were softened by kindness for the coldest and most dismal part of Europe. I beg you will tell my father that I have not had a sou since I came here, where I was brought penniless by order of the all-powerful du Bourguet (the Marquis's confidential agent). I am in the most cruel embarrassment, and came here, moreover, dressed in camlet, whereas woollen is too light for summer clothes here, where everything was covered with snow on May 30 and where there was not a leaf to be seen in the first week of June." When he was writing this letter (hitherto unpublished) on June 11, 1775, was Mirabeau telling his wife the exact truth about his position, or was he exaggerating his troubles in order to excite her compassion and to secure her intervention with the Marquis? There is reason to believe that the severity exercised by M. de Saint-Mauris towards his prisoner was not so rigorous as it was represented. In any case it was not long before his heart was softened. Mirabeau, always an indefatigable reader and taker of notes, was allowed to have books. He could go to Pontarlier when he liked, and the new gaoler carried his kindness so far as to ask him to his parties. It was at one of M. de Saint-Mauris's dinners in June that Mirabeau made an acquaintance which was destined to have a decisive influence on his life.

## CHAPTER IV

### MIRABEAU AND SOPHIE DE MONNIER

The Marquis de Monnier and his wife—The *Essay on Despotism*—Seduction of Sophie by Mirabeau—His escape from Fort de Joux—Flight to Holland—Pamphlets and other works—Arrest and extradition of Mirabeau.

Sophie de Ruffey was the daughter of a President of the Chambre des Comptes of Dijon, and at the age of seventeen had married the Marquis de Monnier, first President of the Chambre des Comptes at Dôle, who was then not under sixty-five. The Marquis had contracted this alliance solely for the purpose of punishing his daughter by a former marriage, who, after a scandalous struggle in the law courts, had married against her father's will a certain musketeer named De Valhadon, by whom she had been compromised. Sophie's husband was a miser and a bigot, though not unkindly; his house was like a convent, and his young wife lived with him quite resigned to the dull domesticity of her existence. This went on for eighteen months or two years, during which nothing seems to have disturbed their very bourgeois *tête-à-tête*.

Then came a sudden change. M. de Saint-Mauris, a friend of the Marquis, came on the scene and did his best to enliven the lonely household. He was a man of sixty, but he made love to the young wife who moped in solitude. She evaded his advances, but temptation, however unattractive, had come her way, and it was enough to reveal to Mme. de Monnier, then nineteen, what a tedious existence she was leading. She formed acquaintanceships with women of her own age, some of whom were not

irreproachable. She asked them to her house, and held gatherings of "the brilliant and the fashionable." Theatricals were organized, and the poetry of *Zaïre* excited her imagination, more particularly when a modest young Orosmane was bold enough to pay court to her. This amusement remained innocent, especially as she was saved by the timidity of her lover, but soon he was succeeded by an artillery officer, M. de Montperreux, who was bolder, and was rewarded by money, letters, even a portrait. That was already much, but it was all, if we may trust the account given by the heroine of this imprudent affair. It was in any case enough to compromise her and to give rise to gossip in the little town. Her reputation, if not her virtue, was therefore far from being intact when Mirabeau saw her for the first time. It was not a case of love at first sight on either side. Mirabeau's passions had other employment in the household of the Procureur du Roi, and Mme. de Monnier was less disturbed by passion than by the ardour of the imagination and the emptiness of her heart. During the summer months they did not meet.

Mirabeau was occupied with the chase and with reading. He had begun a book on *The Salt Marshes of Franche-Comté,* for he could never be inactive. In the previous year, during his exile at Manosque, he had written an *Essay on Despotism* in the midst of the gravest preoccupations, and indeed while his very liberty was at stake. This book appeared anonymously in November 1775, with a motto from Tacitus, *Dedimus profecto grandis patientiæ documentum.* It is an uninteresting compilation in which it is impossible to discover a single original idea worth remembering in the midst of a series of dull reminiscences of other books and a mass of violent declamation. At the utmost we may give the young author of twenty-seven credit for supporting the benefits of civilized society against the theory of Rousseau, of whose genius, eloquent

elegance and rectitude he was already a professed admirer. All the rest is tediously diffuse and long. No one has judged this first effort, whose very title is saved from oblivion by the subsequent glory of the author, more severely than Mirabeau himself. "This book is detestable," he said, "for a book does not consist of a mass of details, and what I wrote is a mere tissue of rags put together in any order and stamped with all the defects natural to my age when I wrote it. It has neither plan nor form nor method nor correctness." Such as it is, it was at any rate an audacious venture, and the Government, whose foundations it attacked and whose abuses it denounced, ordered an inquiry. An imprudence on the part of Mirabeau, the fears of M. de Saint-Mauris who had facilitated the excursions of the author into Switzerland, where the volume was printed, and perhaps also a certain amorous jealousy felt by the Governor of the Château de Joux, produced a catastrophe.

Autumn had brought Mirabeau and Mme. de Monnier together. Their meetings had become more frequent and their intimacy more close. The young woman, invited to tell the story of her life, had poured out her troubles, not concealing her imprudent conduct with M. de Montperreux. The latter was in garrison at Metz, where he did not fail to recount and perhaps to exaggerate his successes. Mirabeau offered to go and recover the letters and the portrait. Did he go? He says he did in the passionate *Dialogue* in which he tells the story of his adventure. But we may hesitate to believe that he did go, as the narrative, both as regards the character of the persons described and the conversation they hold, manifestly owes less to the fidelity of his memory than to the magic power of his eloquence.

Moreover, whether from gratitude, from weakness or from love, Sophie gave way. For her it was fate, and she defended herself very feebly: Mirabeau was to complete

what two lovers less bold or less successful had commenced. He was weary of the commonplace affairs which even at Pontarlier had been enough to satisfy him. His wife, insensible to the eloquence of "the most powerful, the most moving, the most sparkling and vivid of letters," refused to share his fortunes, sent him a few cold lines and obviously intended to forsake him. The Marquis de Mirabeau remained indifferent to his son's appeals. The Bailli himself left to his elder brother the task of answering a letter which his nephew had addressed to him in August, though the petition it contained was sincere, plaintive and prophetic. "This is an age of regeneration," wrote Mirabeau, "an age of ambition, and let me ask you whether you think that your nephew, who is over twenty-six, is good for nothing. No, my dear uncle, you do not think so. Raise me, therefore, deign to deliver me from the terrible ferment in which I am, and which may have the effect of destroying the good which my meditations and trials have done me. Some men must have occupation. Activity, which can do everything, and without which we can do nothing, becomes turbulence when it has neither employment nor object."

This "terrible ferment," which acted alike on Mirabeau's mind, spirit and sense, threw him into the arms of Mme. de Monnier. Though deeply stirred he hesitated. He says he hesitated, and I believe him, because whereas he had hitherto known nothing outside his ill-assorted marriage but "the intercourse of gallantry, which is not love but rather its counterfeit," he now felt himself being dragged into a genuine passion. He has also said, "I was terribly afraid of love," and from such a man such a confession is convincing. His too was the image, the poetry of which should not obscure its ingenuity, which he applied to his own case when he said of his wife, "I was wrong to look for fruit from a tree which bore only blossom."

Blossom and fruit were both offered to him at a time when everything induced him to gather. Sophie was twenty-one. She was tall, dark, plump, well made and vigorous. Her complexion was fresh and clear, her hair and eyes were black, her eyelids short, her forehead broad, her face round with a tip-tilted nose, fine teeth and a short chin. She stammered a little, and her head drooped slightly on one shoulder. She was scarcely to be called pretty, but she was, perhaps handsome, and undoubtedly attractive with her gentleness, her sensibility, her natural wit, her innocent playfulness, her longing for affection, and her unselfish kindness.

As for him, he was tall; his huge head was placed on broad, heavy shoulders. His face was swollen and scarred with small-pox; his hair was woolly; his brown eyes took a tawny shade when he was preoccupied, which was veiled when he wished to please. His nose was large, his mouth thin with even rows of teeth; his skin was white and his hands beautiful. He jested wittily about his ugliness, which with a touch of coquetry he was wont to exaggerate. Voluptuous and ardent, the vigour of his constitution was beyond his control. His imagination was "sulphurous," and passionate and grave and even petulant moods alternated with fits of excessive sensibility, impatience and even fury. He was always inclined to violence, but he controlled himself more easily in great troubles than in small. "I do not cry out when I am angry; I would throw down a wall, I would bite red-hot bullets, but I would not cry out." His voice was admirable, tender, flexible, caressing, and he used it with consummate skill. When he wished to charm none could resist him, neither lords nor peasants, neither his mistresses nor his gaolers. Dazzling and bewildering, outspoken and a liar, braggadocious and sincere, an original and a plagiary, a born and accomplished actor, he could descend from the most lofty speculations to the commonest triviality and the most

revolting obscenity. His rapid gestures, his mobile glances, his bursts of laughter lit up his versatile and brilliant conversation, in the course of which he lavished the rich accumulations of his wide reading, enhanced by his reflections. In a word he was "a splendid exaggeration." This expression was applied by his father to his sister, but it is even more true of him. She extinguished her passions in a convent, while her brother, more audacious and energetic, flaunted his in the world; they were his glory and his pride; he was their slave, and to them he enslaved others. Sophie submitted at once. It was the contrast between them that brought them together, that attracted and kept them to each other. "My character is uneven," he wrote; "I wanted a kindly and indulgent woman to be my joy, and I could not hope that these precious qualities should be combined with much rarer and, in the opinion of most people, incompatible virtues. Nevertheless, my dearest wife, I found them all combined in you." He gives his mistress this title of "wife," which in the eyes of women justifies their weakness and flatters their adultery with the hope or merely with the simulacrum of marriage, in a letter dated December 13. This promise, which flattered in the most delightful manner the ears of the young woman, conquered her hesitation and her resistance, and the words in which she answered, "My dearest . . . my all," confessed her irrevocable fall. The Marquise de Monnier as a historical figure became simply Sophie.

An affair of this kind, which in a large town might have remained hidden, could not long remain unknown at Pontarlier. M. de Saint-Mauris soon saw how things were, and his discovery made itself felt in his relations with his prisoner. Mirabeau always attributed his changed attitude to jealousy. The governor of the château was not merely answerable for his safe-keeping, he was responsible to the captive's father for his conduct, on

which depended what decision he would take as to his son's future. In January 1776 he learned from a note of hand in circulation that Mirabeau had contracted a debt of 1500 livres to a bookseller at Neuchâtel. This was aggravated by the circumstance that the advance was made in payment for the *Essay on Despotism* which he had published. M. de Saint-Mauris saw what risks he was running, and ordered Mirabeau to return to the château, to which he was henceforth to be confined. Mirabeau had been invited to a ball given by M. de Monnier at Pontarlier in his honour, and begged for a respite of four days. The governor granted this favour, which in the circumstances certainly seems to free M. de Saint-Mauris from the charge that he was driven to severity by jealousy.

Instead of returning to the château, Mirabeau wrote the governor an insulting letter in which he announced his intention of removing himself from M. de Saint-Mauris's tyranny. He spent the night of the ball actually at the house of M. de Monnier and then went into hiding at Pontarlier. On the night of February 16, he was detected by M. de Monnier's servants when in the act of visiting his mistress. Nothing daunted he demanded to see the President, on whose credulity he played by means of a madly improbable story told with extraordinary effrontery. Lulled into security by his wife's lover in a scene worthy of the most farcical comedy, the unlucky husband authorized Mme. de Monnier to go to her relations at Dijon. Of course Mirabeau, who had arranged this journey with Sophie, went there too. On the evening of his arrival, knowing that Mme. de Monnier was going to a ball given by M. de Montherot, Grand Provost of Burgundy, he had the extravagant impudence to go to the party himself under the name of the "Marquis de Lancefoudras." M. de Montherot did not make too much of the incident, but he could not be unaware of Mirabeau's irregular position, and he asked for the orders of the Minister. Immediately

after the flight from the Château de Joux, M. de Malesherbes had received contradictory petitions from the Marquis de Mirabeau and from the Marquise. The father was, of course, hostile to his son, while the mother vehemently pleaded his cause. After somewhat protracted negotiation the Minister gave orders that Mirabeau should be confined in the castle of Dijon, but with a fairly large measure of liberty to be regulated by the Grand Provost. Then on the advice of a special committee, he decided on April 30 that Mirabeau should be transferred to Doullens. Shortly after this he retired and Mirabeau asserted that he sent him word that his best course was to go abroad and make his way while his affairs were settling down in France. It is not improbable that he did so. In any case Mirabeau, either spontaneously or as the result of this advice, decided to make his escape. He had as usual won over those who had charge of him; the Grand Provost and the governor of the castle treated him more as a friend than as a prisoner, and on the night of March 24–25, he fled from Dijon and reached Verrières in Switzerland.

As he had not succeeded in re-entering the army in spite of a pathetic appeal to the Minister of War, or in justifying himself as he continually asked to be allowed to do before a court of law, perhaps this was his only course. But what was he to do? And what was Sophie to do? Mirabeau felt that "it would be absolute madness to carry her off," but unluckily he had got himself into "such a position that everything he did was wrong." Mme. de Monnier, shut up by her family, watched, spied upon, threatened with the Salpêtrière or with a convent, had, or thought she had, to choose between death and flight. Was Mirabeau to "let her drink the fatal cup?" To his honour it must be said that this never occurred to him. Sophie tried to join him at Verrières; she failed. Mirabeau, on whose tracks the Ruffey family had set the police, was forced to fly to Savoy. His sister, Mme. de

Cabris, her lover, Briançon, and her cousin, Mlle. de la Tour-Baulieu, a young lady of twenty-three, joined him at Thonon on June 16. It was an extraordinary affair. Mirabeau did not fail to seduce the young cousin who, though engaged to be married, made little resistance. Pursued by two detectives, sent after his son by the Marquis de Mirabeau, Mirabeau and Briançon succeeded in throwing them off the scent, and went to Geneva to the Château de la Balme, to Lorgues in Provence, whence Mirabeau, now alone, suddenly set off on August 13, via Piedmont, the Alps and Switzerland, to meet Sophie at Verrières. She had by this time succeeded in gradually relaxing the surveillance under which she was kept, and joined him there on the night of August 24. Her flight was not noticed until the hour of evening prayers, which were said every night in the house of her family.

Was this an abduction? Mirabeau denied it, and the circumstances gave some colour to his contention. It even appears that he tolerated rather than suggested or planned Sophie's departure. His letters to Mme. de Cabris prove how much he hesitated. His own flight abroad might relieve his difficulties, on the other hand Sophie's presence embarrassed him and made his position worse in every way. It was not blind passion that could have influenced his decision. No doubt he loved Mme. de Monnier, who in spite of her imprudence and misconduct was very different from the lights of love of whom he had met so many. But a profound and durable attachment was not in his nature. What bound him to Sophie was not his love for her, but her passion for him. He found her "less capable of the passions of the senses than of those of the soul"; he awoke sensual passion in her, and with her soul she had given him her life. She was distinctly unlike the other women he had known. She was gentle, and to all appearance calm, but "the passions of a gentle woman, though perhaps more difficult to

arouse, are infinitely more ardent than those of any other, and are really invincible once they are well alight." By such a flame Sophie's heart was being devoured. Her choice was "Gabriel or death," and nothing could induce her to contemplate any third possibility. "Listen, I can no longer endure this state of suffering; it is too terrible to be far away from my husband and to know that he is unhappy. Let us be together, or let me die. If I stay here I shall never see next year, I neither can nor wish to. . . . To live apart from you is to die a thousand times every day. . . . Shall I never receive the signal for my departure? You told me that we should live quietly, sufficient for each other, that you would learn languages, music, painting. No doubt you still think so, and as for me I am ready for anything. What does it matter whether I work at home or in a shop, or as a children's governess, or as anything you like, provided we are together? There is nothing I will not do in order to be reunited to you. Nothing would frighten me. My present condition is terrible, I can support it no longer; there must be an end of it, and again I say Gabriel or death!"

Was it merely this cry for help, this recall to his "plighted troth," that induced Gabriel to respond. He always said so, not seeing that he was taking away from love what he sacrificed to pity and honour. Perhaps, however, there was another motive. In a moment of loneliness and exasperation he had had the monstrous and criminal folly to write an abominable letter to Sophie, falsely accusing himself of the horrible crime of having seduced his sister, Mme. de Cabris. This letter had been lost, or, rather, not lost but intercepted, owing to the surveillance with which he was constantly surrounded, or to the treachery of a messenger. How was he to resist the publication of this infamous though stupid document, which would be a terrible weapon in the hands of his

father? It would ruin all his plans, break all his defences, and would deliver him up to the malevolence of all his own relations, and those of his wife alike, who would be united against him by disgust. Where could he find refuge? Sophie called him, and he flew to Verrières. Is it necessary to go further and denounce another and not less odious aberration? Mirabeau always denied with indignation the charge brought against him by Sophie's relatives of having "carried off Mme. de Monnier in order to appropriate her money." This "infamous accusation" left him "speechless." Unfortunately it is not altogether possible to accept the testimony of witnesses afterwards examined at the inquiry, though it is precise and coherent. There are letters from Sophie and also letters from Mirabeau, which, though they do not confess all, say enough to form material for melancholy revelations. Neither Mirabeau's genuine poverty nor the morality of his time can excuse his weakness. It is but too true that money was destined to be the incurable sore in his life!

The fugitive couple, after three weeks spent at an inn at Verrières, where the police did not succeed in catching them, left on September 15 for Holland. This country had an active and celebrated publishing trade, from which Mirabeau hoped to make a living. They took up their abode at Amsterdam, and the first news they heard from France was the conclusion of the Villeneuve affair. Mirabeau was sentenced in his absence to pay a fine of 6000 livres to M. de Mouans, and to make a humiliating apology.

He immediately set about looking for work, introduced himself to the bookseller Rey as the author of the *Essay on Despotism,* and offered his services. He added, "I know several languages, and have much facility and the will and the need to work." The work he sought did not come to him for two or three months, and at first consisted of translations from English, which Mirabeau had

learned without assistance. He understood or could read five or six languages. He had been taught Latin, but he had had "to re-learn it," a fact which inspired the following interesting reflection, which is of some pedagogic value: "As a rule schoolmasters learn to study and nothing more." His views on the study of foreign languages are equally original; they were in advance of his time, and indeed it is only now that we are able to see how fruitful they are. "As for speaking, a master could not teach you more than you can learn all by yourself by seeking out natives and conversing with them. When you feel the want of a dictionary, ask. Get the English papers, which are in every one's hands, and in the process of amusing yourself you will begin to understand."

Mirabeau worked from six in the morning till nine o'clock at night, and has given a charming description of his life. "An hour's music rested me after my work, and my adorable companion, who, though she had been brought up and accustomed to opulence, was never so gay, so brave, so attentive, so placid and so tender as in her days of poverty, made my life beautiful. She copied extracts for me, she worked, read, painted, corrected proofs. Her unchanging gentleness, her inexhaustible sympathy, were developed in their full strength. The brush falls from my hand—I cannot finish the picture." In order to complete it we may add that Sophie was as good as her word, and gave lessons in Italian.

In addition to the translations by which he made his living, Mirabeau was engaged on work of his own. He had been a Free Mason since his youth, and among his papers in the hand of a copyist has been found a scheme for the international organization of Free Masonry, which he no doubt dictated at Amsterdam. This draft contains views on the solidarity of mankind, the advantages of education, and on "the reform of systems of government and legislation," which are much superior to those ex-

pressed in the *Essay on Despotism*. Mirabeau's mind had matured. The duties which he lays down for the "brothers of the superior order" contain, in fact, what amounts to a plan of reform very similar in some parts to that afterwards carried out by the Constituent Assembly. Among his suggestions are the suppression of feudal servitudes connected with the land and of the rights of mortmain, abolition of corvées, of guilds and mysteries, of customs and excise. He advocated the reduction of imposts, religious toleration, the freedom of the press, and the suppression of special jurisdictions. For the organization and development necessary to success, Mirabeau quotes the example of the Jesuits. "Our aims," he observes, "are very different. We wish to enlighten men and make them free and happy; but we can and should achieve our end by the same means, and what is to prevent us from using for a good purpose what the Jesuits have used for an evil one?"

His *Avis aux Hessois*, a work of lofty and generous intention, protested vehemently against the sale of soldiers by the Prince of Hesse, who exported them to England for use against the American rebels. In spite of its repetitions and an over-declamatory tone, this protest is rapid, lively and vigorous, though there is in it more of the orator than the author. It was, however, in his answer to a pamphlet directed against the *Avis* that we find Mirabeau's ideas on the duties of Government and the rights of peoples. This reply is both strong and clever, and in it wit comes to the assistance of argument. It is very French in form, and already we hear a menacing note. Declarations like this were not addressed to Hesse alone. "When authority becomes arbitrary and oppressive; when it attacks property for the protection of which it was created; when it breaks the contract which at once assured and limited its rights, resistance becomes a duty and cannot be called rebellion."

About the same time, that is to say in the early months of 1777, Mirabeau sent to the Amsterdam newspapers an essay entitled *Le Lecteur y mettra le Titre,* which bears witness to the extraordinary suppleness of his intelligence. Music, which he had studied in his youth, was one of his favourite recreations. Concerts of vocal and instrumental music were being given at Amsterdam, which he was careful not to miss, and he would even go as far as the Hague to gratify his taste. The concerts were very well attended, but Mirabeau had no illusions about the various motives which attracted the audience. "At Amsterdam," he wrote, "one goes to concerts because it is one way of meeting people in a country where there is no society, because if one doesn't like music one does like to see pretty and, above all, agreeable women, because ladies who know nothing of the art of combining sounds are at least observed, and to be observed is worth while when one knows or hopes that one deserves such an attention." This description is true of more places than Amsterdam in 1777.

Mirabeau himself was there to hear, to understand and to criticize, and on the occasion of the production of two new symphonies he set forth his ideas about music. *Le Lecteur y mettra le Titre* is like one of Diderot's headings, and the essay itself recalls Diderot's lucid and witty alertness of manner. Mirabeau proclaims himself a disciple of Rousseau, for whom he never missed an opportunity of expressing his admiration, but he is none the less bold and original. He abounds in happy formulæ, such as "everything, including silence, is included in what melody can express," and "the poet engages my mind, the musician stirs my heart." Is the following applicable only to 1777, or does it not apply even now in the criticism of certain music? "It is not my purpose to inquire here whether since the invention of counterpoint harmony has not been allowed to shine at the expense of melody, as it

is easier to be learned than to be inventive, whether this excessive ornamentation has not impoverished music and whether the diversity of parts introduced by harmony and the complexities of the harmonies themselves have not been injurious to melody."

Mirabeau expounded with a striking propriety of expression the relation between music and poetry, and the mutual assistance they can render. His essential thesis is the defence of instrumental music, "which is, and always will be the principal object of the composer, the basis of his art, the highest expression of his talent." He lays down conditions, laws and limits, and apart from Rousseau, I know no one who at the end of the eighteenth century wrote about music with more power and more art than Mirabeau. This is too little known, and it is to me a pleasure as well as an act of justice to restore to him the accomplishment by which he gave evidence of an unexpected characteristic of his wide, complex and versatile intelligence.

There was also in Mirabeau a polemical controversialist. Unhappily for him he chose at this point in his career to turn his formidable gift against his father. In the preceding year he had allowed his mother and his sister to turn into a memoir, with "an ill-constructed and ill-written" introduction, the letters he had written to M. de Malesherbes, in which he did not spare the *Ami des Hommes*. The odious imputation he had made against Mme. de Cabris violently irritated his mother, whose favourite daughter she was, and who had always been a faithful ally in the quarrels with M. de Mirabeau, even going so far as to furnish money to keep her lawsuits going. Summoned to explain himself, Mirabeau impudently denied having written the abominable letter in question, and this appeased the Marquise. She even ceased to insist on Mirabeau sending back Sophie "to her honoured husband." She even allowed Mme. de Monnier

to call her "mamma" in the same way as she referred to her daughter's lover as "my son-in-law Briançon." It was in this way that she repaid the services rendered by her children against their father.

Mirabeau had drawn up for her a certain *Précis* which is lost, but which the Marquis said surpassed in violence all that had appeared against him. Another pamphlet was coming out in Holland under the promising title, *An Anecdote worthy to be added to the voluminous collection of Philosophic Hypocrisies*, and under the pretext of replying to a benevolent criticism of the *Essay on Despotism,* in the *Gazette Littéraire d'Amsterdam,* Mirabeau told the story of the principal events of his life. Had he been content to keep to defending himself and to describing all his actions as actuated by sensibility, patriotism and honour, there would not have been much to be said. The reader might even have approved such a happy phrase as this: "Deprived of counsel and guidance, I was a young and lusty tree tormented by sap, throwing out greedy branches which a skilful gardener would have carefully pruned and cultivated." But the *Anecdote* was in reality merely another deliberate attack on the Marquis. One sentence is enough to show the tone in which it was written. "It is notorious," he wrote, "that the 'friend of man' has been the friend neither of his wife nor of his children, that he preaches virtue, beneficence and frugality, while he is the worst of husbands and the hardest and most spendthrift of fathers."

This attack was inopportune. For several months the Marquis, acting either on happy inspiration or on good advice, had ceased to trouble himself about his son. He had refused to associate himself with the de Ruffey family in the steps which they proposed to take to cause the arrest of the fugitives, and he had even given up the guardianship with which he had been entrusted when Mirabeau's civil rights had been suspended. The *Anecdote* again

aroused his anger. In concert with the Ruffeys he caused to be sent to Holland a police officer named des Bruguières, who had failed to catch Mirabeau when he fled from Dijon, and wanted his revenge. M. de Vergennes, Minister of Foreign Affairs, had asked for the extradition of the couple through the Duc de Vauguyon, French Minister to the United Provinces. Mirabeau had had himself made a "burgher" and thought he was safe: in order to deliver him up, an order from the States General was required. Sophie and he were warned, but they were arrested on May 14, the very day on which they meant to fly. Four days previously the Lieutenant Criminel of the Bailliage of Pontarlier had concluded the case brought by M. de Monnier against the guilty lovers. Mirabeau, "accused and convicted of the crime of abduction and seduction," had been condemned "to be beheaded, the sentence to be carried out in effigy by the executioner"; in addition, he was to pay a fine of 5000 livres and 40,000 livres damages. Mme. de Monnier was found guilty of adultery and condemned "to be imprisoned for life in the Home of Refuge at Besançon, and there to be shaved and branded like a common harlot." These sentences were pronounced *in contumaciam*.

The request for their extradition had been granted on condition that Mirabeau's debts, amounting to 9050 livres, should be paid before he left Amsterdam. His father heard of his arrest with a savage roar of joy. "I received notice yesterday," he wrote to the Bailli, "that the scoundrel is in irons, under lock and key!" He now had to pay the bill, that is to say Mirabeau's debts, and the police charges, "a hard matter in these days, when our coffers have a girdle of chastity." The French Minister advanced the necessary money. Sophie had tried to commit suicide, but promised not to do so again on des Bruguières undertaking to help her to correspond with her lover later on. The policeman was, in fact, won over by Mirabeau, who

treated him with great liberality, and received signal services at his hands while in his custody. When the couple arrived at Paris they went to des Bruguières' own house, where they parted after a distressing scene. Mirabeau had an attack of hemorrhage, while Sophie, conquering her weakness, had the strength of mind not to turn her head at his cry, "I have made you very unhappy!" Her gentleness, her misfortune and her condition softened the heart of Le Noir, the Lieutenant-General of Police, who spared her the horrors of Sainte-Pélagie, and sent her under the name of Mme. de Courvière to a house of correction kept by a Mlle. Douay, at first in the Rue de Charonne, and afterwards in the Rue de Bellefond.

## CHAPTER V

### MIRABEAU AT VINCENNES

M. Le Noir and M. Boucher—Correspondence with Sophie—Protests of Mirabeau—His occupation—*Lettres de cachet*—The Comtesse de Mirabeau and M. de Marignane—Negotiations leading to Mirabeau's release.

MIRABEAU was locked up on June 8, 1777, in a room "ten feet square," in the Keep of Vincennes. The Duc de Beaufort, the Prince de Condé, the Prince de Conti, M. de Longueville, and the Cardinal de Retz had been his predecessors in captivity. He was destined to remain there until December 13, 1780. The rules of the prison were strict, but their severity was much relaxed in Mirabeau's favour. It is true that he was not allowed to leave his cell to walk in the garden or the enclosure surrounding the castle until the end of 1779, but it was not long before he was allowed to have books from outside, and even, under certain restrictions, to correspond with Sophie. Two men contributed to secure him this mitigation of his punishment—Le Noir, the lieutenant of police, and his chief clerk, Boucher. M. Le Noir had no love for the "economists." In 1775, during the Ministry of Turgot, he had been relieved of his office for not repressing the bread riots with sufficient energy, and he attributed his disgrace to the intervention of the *Ami des Hommes*. When Mirabeau wrote to him, "I hate sects and I despise sectaries," he well knew what advantages and indulgences he might gain by such a profession of faith, which, coming from him, was sincere enough, though hardly disinterested. The leniency shown to the son by the Lieutenant of Police was his way

of revenging himself for the severity which he believed that he had experienced at the hands of the father. As for Boucher, he was ready to follow his chief's example, like the docile and prudent clerk that he was, all the more because he was a Free Mason like Mirabeau, and, like him also, a man of artistic and literary tastes, who was dominated by the intellectual superiority and attracted by the talent and the charm of his fascinating prisoner. Skilfully used, these influences triumphed in the end over the more strictly correct methods of M. de Rougemont, who, however, seems himself to have treated Mirabeau well from the first.

Between the captive of Vincennes and the inmate of Mlle. Douay's establishment the police agent des Bruguières served as intermediary, transmitting news and carrying letters from the one to the other. Unfortunately, his duties required him to be often absent. In December 1777 the lovers were authorized to correspond directly, but their letters had to be addressed to the Lieutenant of Police, and were first examined by him. Having thus been submitted to a sort of preliminary censorship, they were read by the two lovers, who had to return them to the Police Office.

On January 7, 1778, Sophie gave birth to a daughter, to the disappointment of Mirabeau, who in his letters always spoke prospectively of his son. This daughter, offspring of a double adultery, was registered under the name of "Sophie Gabrielle, daughter of Marie Thérèse Sophie Richard de Ruffey, wife of Messire Claude François, Marquis de Monnier." On June 18 Sophie was transferred to the Convent of St. Claire at Gien. Her correspondence continued, and after June 1779 was accompanied by a secret correspondence, which at a later stage was partly written in cipher by means of a cryptographic alphabet specially compiled by Mirabeau.

In 1792 Manuel, Procureur de la Commune de Paris

published the *Letters from the Keep of Vincennes*, which he had found chiefly in the archives of the Bastille. Mirabeau's family protested strongly, but in vain, against this publication. In 1780 Mirabeau, fearing some similar project on the part of Mme. Cabris, with whom he had quarrelled and was now on the worst possible terms, wrote to Mme. du Saillant: "I am threatened with worse still. Some of the monsters who pollute the streets of Paris, while so many decent people are groaning in the Bicêtre and in the galleys, are loudly boasting that they are going to print my letters and those of the unhappy victim of my love! This is a terrible blow, and if I survive it shall be to revenge myself, should it cost me my life."

This correspondence, which is celebrated but little known, was far from being fit for publication. Its intimate character explains, without excusing, the licentious passages which are its least worthy title to fame. It was these passages which at first aided the success of the book by the scandal they caused, and then crushed it with a dead weight under which it would succumb were they not (though all too numerous) a small and easily negligible fraction of the whole. Mirabeau's love for Sophie, for their little girl, his advice about education, his grievances against his father, his health, his work, his plans, his chances of release, these are the most frequent topics. Their repetition is inevitable, but it is also tedious. Mirabeau admits this, for he says: "In my situation everything unceasingly brings back the same needs and the same ideas." In addition to being tedious, his letters were also insincere, as the censorship to which they were submitted forced him to dissemble his sentiments, to attenuate or exaggerate them as the case required. He could neither say all he meant nor mean all he said. What he wrote was intended as much for his patron, whom he had to humour and flatter, as for Sophie herself. The correspondence is not, however, without interest. To neglect it would be to misunderstand the man

it depicts, but it does not occupy the position which legend persists in assigning to it.

Mirabeau was an admirer if not a disciple of Rousseau, and when he is in love his inspiration is the *Nouvelle Héloïse*. What he copies, however, is chiefly the defects of that work, the declamatory verbiage, the frigidity which he exaggerates in his own writings. He has neither spontaneity of passion, nor imagination, nor any real poetic feeling. His protestations suggest not a simple, natural, nor (it must be confessed) a profound or sincere attachment so much as mere sensual delirium exalted and excited by solitude and the intoxication which comes of remembrance. There is more of his physical temperament than of the outpourings of his heart in what he writes. When his heart seems to speak it is merely his brain overloaded with reminiscences of his reading which guides his pen. Amplification is the leading feature of his method. One would think sometimes that he is writing for the sake of filling his paper, of making up his pages and of killing time. Not only does he repeat himself; he imitates himself as he imitates others. He borrows whole passages from the memoranda addressed by him to his father or to the authorities and throws them into his letters. That was his own, and he had a right to take it; but he takes from others as well—a copy of verses here, an anecdote there, and when he writes to Sophie, "Listen, my dearest, and I will pour my heart out into yours," all that he does pour is an article from the *Mercure de France*.

Fortunately, he can speak in other accents which were really his own. When he is addressing ministers he expresses himself with a force which makes his cause the cause of liberty itself. When he addresses the King his tone is even higher: "Sir, I am a Frenchman, young and unhappy; these are all claims to your Majesty's interest." He does not beg for mercy; he claims his rights, bringing before the "equity" of the Sovereign

a "denial of justice." He does not deny his errors, but "they are not crimes; and, if they were, are they enough to justify his condemnation, his imprisonment, and the persistent refusal to hear him?" "If a man had to be irreproachable, Sir, in order to preserve his liberty, it is but too true that all your subjects would be in prison." Ministers are too much occupied with important matters not to consider the affairs of private persons trifling and tedious. He demands a trial. "Magistrates, who are the depositaries and the organs of the law, have time to inquire: it is their business and their duty. They are your Majesty's conscience, if I may be permitted to use such an expression, and they have no terrors except for the guilty or the calumniator." The peroration is a really fine and dignified appeal. "Sir, I implore your clemency because I have errors with which to reproach myself; I demand your justice because I have committed no crime, and because it is terrible to punish the sins of youth as if they were atrocious offences. Deign, Sir, to save me from my persecutors, who have done me too much ill not to hate me, and to whom my destruction would be too welcome for them to cease to try to bring it about. Cast one kindly glance upon a man of twenty-eight, full of zeal and emulation, who is buried in a living tomb, with no prospect in the best years of his life but lassitude, despair, and perhaps madness."

It is, however, in a *Memoir* addressed to his father that Mirabeau displays all the qualities of his mind. This speech *pro domo* is a real masterpiece, the vehemence of which never sinks into declamation. He is ironical without insolence, indignant yet affecting, measured yet instant. The skill with which he makes the inevitable admissions and concessions gives to the whole an air of sincerity which is both persuasive and seductive. All the talent of the man may be found in this piece. He has spoken of it as "a long, tedious production, composed without skill," but he did not believe a word of this; he felt and knew how

powerful it was. A memoir in which he reviewed all the events of his life could not but be long, the essential point was to go straight on to the end, and he does so without a single repetition, without a stop, without unnecessary development or a single useless detail. As for its being tedious, nothing could be more alive than this rapid, concentrated, often poignant confession. It was certainly not unskilful, but the skill is concealed, or rather it arises not from grasp of artificial composition, but from the natural spontaneity of the writer.

Mirabeau commences with striking simplicity: "My dear father, it is unworthy of you to take part against me, for it is a deep degradation of the paternal dignity to descend to the level of your child; but it is not reprehensible in me to take you as the judge in your own cause, to bring before your own tribunal my claims against you." Before this tribunal, prejudiced, partial and hostile as it was, he narrates all the facts, and comments upon them with an eloquence of admirable flexibility, variety and ease. In turn he is vehement, grave, witty, light, graceful, indignant, restrained, exuberant, simple and elaborate. The vivacity and passion of his speech is such that it uses every tone, every manner, and in all it produces precisely the effect intended, and precisely the right effect. When he speaks of the prison which has now become the universe for him he needs only a single phrase to evoke his situation—"What a horrible mutilation of existence!" he cries. "Father, you cannot but have shrunk in horror from these silent tortures before you ordered them to be applied!" He finds a striking image to express his sense of the youthful errors which have weighed so heavily upon his life. "My early years, like reckless prodigals, had already in some sense disinherited those that were to come, and had dissipated part of my powers." Is it, he asks, by way of just punishment for his faults, or for his own benefit in order to deliver him from their consequences, or

out of respect for the family honour, that his father persists in his inhuman conduct? "If it is justice, may I not surrender myself to the judges?—I should not be punished without being convicted. If you think you are acting for my benefit you are mistaken: you rate too highly the love which you think I have for life. Perhaps you will say that the honour of our house requires that I should be saved from the sentence of a court. I reply that as our honour concerns others as well as you, you have no right to be the sole judge of what it requires!" Finally, there is a cry into which he really puts his whole soul. "I cannot endure such a way of life; I cannot endure it! Let me see the sun, let me breathe a freer air; let me see the faces of my kind. . . . If you give me the liberty, even a restricted liberty, which I ask of you, prison will have made me a better man, for time, which passes over my head with a much heavier foot than over other men, has aroused me from my dreams."

Meanwhile, he composed poetry—very bad poetry; he sang with taste and feeling; he drew, read, took notes and devoted himself to an all-devouring study of letters, science and art. He gave his attention to medicine, developed ideas of education which were in advance of his time, and did not even give up all hope of turning his military aptitudes to account. He criticized contemporary authors with great acuteness, placing Rousseau above the rest, but he loved La Fontaine, whom he knew by heart and constantly quoted, and also the "divine Racine," whose "mighty genius, supple imagination and enchanting style" he afterwards praised in a panegyric on *Britannicus*.

He was a severe critic of himself, and took the view that he was "neither above nor below any sort of business." He was aware of his gifts, and knew that there was more in him than "the crudity of a young man who was long about sowing his wild oats." He said to himself that "the flame of the passions is often the fire of genius," and he

did not despair of the future. "The next time I shall be dead and buried, but if I may believe my head and my heart, and a certain kind of presentiment which is often the voice of the soul, my life may not be altogether useless."

His intellectual energy, which he spent feverishly on all sorts of subjects, was astonishing. He composed tales, dialogues and tragedies; he translated Tacitus, Tibullus and Boccaccio; he wrote for Sophie a treatise on inoculation and a grammar; he studied the Koran and the religion of Islam; he commenced a history of the United Provinces, and also, unfortunately, he wrote vile things for which he had no other excuse but that he was in need of money for books, and even more urgent necessaries.

In his writing he had collaborators whom he describes as "extractors," and whose exact share is difficult to determine. His most important work at Vincennes was *Lettres de Cachet and State Prisons*. It was published in 1782, and Brissot attributed it to Mirabeau's uncle, the Bailli, as did Peltier, who contended that it was impossible for the author to have consulted at Vincennes the nine hundred authors whom he cites.

The book was, however, written by Mirabeau, who says that before his confinement he had collected materials for a great work, of which there was only to be a single chapter. The *Lettres de Cachet* made a great sensation, and had a success which was assisted by prosecution and suppression. The book is vigorous and incisive, and well supported by documents; but it is not surprising that it has lost its freshness. The system of the *lettre de cachet* now seems to us such a monstrous violation of justice and individual liberty; it is so difficult for us nowadays not merely to accept the principle, but even to conceive of its existence, that to argue against it seems surprisingly tedious and superfluous. Mirabeau's discussion of the question is abundant and exuberant; there are some lucid and vivid chapters; but the whole work is encumbered and

overloaded with the repetitions which were his besetting sin as an author. There is not much philosophy in it; the author makes no attempt to rise to general ideas, and, on the other hand, he starts with preconceived ideas and hostilities which interfere with the freedom of his judgment. Louis XI, Richelieu and Louis XIV are particularly obnoxious to the author, who refuses to recognize the special achievement or merit of these great men. His hatred for religion is an equally serious source of aberration, and these prejudiced views are the more discordant as elsewhere he shows great insight. An aristocrat by birth and temperament, he clearly saw how much damage the conferring of titles by the Sovereign for a price had done to the military nobility. On the other hand, he expresses his respect for the "noblesse de robe," and declares that "never did any order in the State do more for the country or cost less than the judicature." Judges, he thought, should be irremovable. "The independence of the judges in the administration of justice is as necessary as their freedom, if the liberties, the honour, and the lives of our citizens are to be safe. Magistrates are to be the organs, not the interpreters, of the law; otherwise they would become mere legislators." He is in favour of education, but has a horror of "national cowardice." "The chief duty of the wise educator," he says, "is to secure for the State forces capable of defending its territory, its laws and its freedom. Every political system which does not maintain a thoroughly sound military establishment, or rather which does not inspire the people with the military spirit so necessary to its preservation (a spirit, I may observe in passing, which is diametrically opposed to the madness of militarism), every political system, I say, which lacks this essential is defective." Anticipating the States General, he declares that "the law, in order to be just, legitimate and obligatory —in order, in fact, to be truly the law, must be sealed by the free and universal consent of the people." He adds

that "in every state in which the citizens do not participate in the power of legislation by delegation of a body of representatives freely elected by the majority of the people, wisely restricted by their instructions, especially as to the nature and the collection of taxes, and subject to the control of their constituents, there neither is nor can be any public liberty."

These passages, with their power and precision, reveal the statesman, and show how when his hour came he was ready to play a part in the Revolution, which was the realization of his principles. I should, however, be unjust to the author if I did not say that there are also in his book picturesque and vivid pages, especially about Amsterdam and about London. The following description of Paris, too, is less out of date than might be supposed. "You have indeed reason to be proud of your police, O Parisians! You are polluted by the filth of your people and your streets: your houses are so high that they shut out the air. . . . Your wine merchants poison you. Everywhere your health and your purses are assailed by a multiplicity of the most dangerous temptations. Every day in your absurdly constructed theatres you brave insalubrity and contagion. . . . O Parisians, admire your sublime police!" It is difficult to believe that this was written in 1778.

Between two pamphlets or between two letters to Sophie, Mirabeau, ill fed, ill clothed and unwell, racked with violent pains in his back and troubled with enfeebled eyesight, multiplied his appeals to M. Le Noir, to the Duc de Noailles, to M. Amelot, the Secretary of State, and to the Comte de Maurepas to be set free, or at least to be brought to trial. His father sent some one to visit him once, and only once, and remained inflexible. His cruelty, which nothing could disarm, found expression in savage terms. "I shall do my best," he said, "to seal up this madman as bees seal up a snail which has found its way into their

hive." An unforeseen accident unexpectedly secured what the most passionate prayers had failed to accomplish. Mirabeau's son died suddenly on October 8, 1778, on the very day on which he completed his fifth year. Mirabeau had seen very little of him, and though not without paternal affection, was, on his own confession, more interested in his adulterous offspring. The misfortune gave the Comtesse de Mirabeau a terrible shock, which seemed for a moment to tear her away from the futilities and frivolous amusements to which she devoted her life. The Marquis was quite prostrated. "I could not but ask Heaven," he wrote, "with more tears than I have shed in all my life, to deign to inform my conscience what are the crimes by which I have deserved such an unexampled accumulation of sorrows." Mme. du Saillant, fearing to "reopen so recent a wound," sent her condolences, not to her sister-in-law, but to the Marquis de Marignane. Mme. de Pailly added a postscript to the following effect: "May Mme. de Pailly be permitted to add, M. le Marquis, that she mingles her tears with those which are being shed here at the loss which you have suffered. She will not attempt to express to your daughter the deep sympathy she feels on this melancholy occasion, but she trusts that neither she nor you will doubt the interest she takes in all that concerns you, or her prayers for your health." (October 20, 1778.)

On the advice of her father, and perhaps as the result of this letter, Mme. de Mirabeau decided to leave for Le Bignon. Suddenly, however, either because she was afraid of falling ill there, or because she doubted her welcome, she changed her mind. The Marquis was annoyed, and on November 13 he wrote asking her to come. "My dear daughter, as you wish to come to me and your father makes no objection, I insist on your keeping your word. Your old father has need of you. You know my heart; it is old enough and uniform enough in its working,

it has no secret chamber. . . . I am doing my best, my child, I need all my courage to live, to exist. A long, a very long series of overwhelming and almost daily misfortunes, my work and my reflections, have taught me to conquer even my most natural and innocent sentiments. My example will perhaps teach you how with a dagger in one's heart one can and ought to conceal a hopeless wound in the presence of others, how one may appear calm and interested in them and theirs, and in the things of everyday life, how one may even be cheerful. This way of life is possible, and one even finds in it some relief for our poor bodies, one learns to work a great deal and think little, and to appear and to be the same just because one is not oneself."

In spite of a further and pressing invitation dated December 30, 1778, Mme. de Mirabeau did not come. Perhaps a passage in the former letter, which was intended to reassure her, had had the contrary effect. "If any one were mean enough," the Marquis had said, "to think or say that I want you to come in order to entrap you into a reconciliation, you surely are not the sort of woman to believe it." Doubtless the Marquis was above setting traps, but if it was too early to attempt a reconciliation, it was clear that if there was to be a reconciliation at all, it could not be postponed too long after the death of his grandchild. The Marquis was obsessed with the idea of founding a great family, and had already "laid his plans for a great marriage with a child not yet two years old." This project was dead and buried, but, to use the Bailli's picturesque expression, the Marquis's "posteromania" persisted, and it contributed to Mirabeau's release.

Dupont (afterwards De Nemours), a friend of the Marquis and a collaborator of Turgot, was working in that direction with the assent of the *Ami des Hommes,* who stood aside in order to watch and guide the negotiations,

intending at the proper moment to emerge and impose what conditions he thought fit. The discussion was prolonged. In May 1779 Dupont persuaded Mirabeau to write a letter to his father, asking to be forgiven for his faults, and assuring him of the sincerity of his confessions and his good resolutions. If this step cost Mirabeau very little, "for the recollection of a father is always affecting," it was very different with the overtures which, according to Dupont's plan, he had to make to his wife. Nevertheless, he made up his mind to this course. After having obtained the consent and approbation of Sophie, who in all this business showed the most admirable self-abnegation, he gave the Countess to understand that his fate depended upon her, that assuredly his father would not refuse to listen to her, and that he was not incapable of showing gratitude to her for what she might do for him. Six weeks later he received a letter from his wife, who reminded him that he had insulted her in one of his memoirs, and contented herself with expressing her good wishes for his happiness without taking any steps to further it. An appeal addressed by Mirabeau to his father-in-law, M. de Marignane, drew a brutal reply in which there was an implied threat of a suit for separation. Without their co-operation there was nothing to be done, for the Marquis de Mirabeau was acting only in the hope of a reconciliation of the spouses, which might result in his having another grandson, and refused to take any step unless asked to do so by his daughter-in-law.

Convinced of the necessity of making a further supplication, Mirabeau in April 1780 made up his mind to a final effort. The two letters which he wrote to his wife and to his father-in-law have not hitherto been published. I will quote the essential parts. His health serves as the pretext. To his wife he writes: "My health is very bad. I am excessively tormented with kidney trouble, to which you know I am subject; I am attacked with gravel, threat-

ened with stone; my eyes are going. I shall never get better here. The Governor of the Château, as is admitted by the Minister and the judge, has seen my father, and informed him of my condition. My father replied that my liberty (and therefore my life) depended entirely on you. He would refuse you nothing you chose to ask, but he would not take on himself to do anything which you might not desire. I am therefore entirely at your mercy, and at that of your father; and I am glad that it is so, for you are not wanting in humanity, in sensibility, in nobility. I am writing to him, and he will tell you all that I now ask you to do. If you would do more I should be deeply touched, but I should not take it ill if you and he think fit to let me earn and deserve whatever further consideration you may hereafter show me. In any case I shall feel bound, by gratitude for the service you may do me, to do my best to please you in all things. You have known my heart, but only when it was much less mature than it now is as the result of so many years of misfortune and suffering. You have seen how sensible I always am of benefits conferred, and I say with the utmost sincerity that what I have learned of your disposition would make it most gratifying to me if one more bond could be added to those which unite or ought to unite us."

To understand the depth of the humiliation which Mirabeau must have felt in writing this letter, we must remember that by the publication of one single letter he could have dishonoured the woman whose nobility he vaunted, and whom since his imprisonment at Vincennes he had not ceased to cover with abuse and insults. It was not merely her intervention that he solicited. We have only to read between the lines of his letter to see that from this time forward he allowed it to be seen that he hoped to be re-united to her. Truly the Marquis had reason to be satisfied. His son's submission would not deceive either his desires or his hopes.

In writing to M. de Marignane, Mirabeau could not forget the "severe reprimand" which had been the reply to his first petition, and which was not wholly deserved. "In so far as I have been the victim of circumstances beyond my control, or of the over-violent passions of youth, I can only confess that I have been wrong and ask your pardon, with a keen desire to make amends so far as it is possible for me to do so, and to devote to the expiation of my faults the same energy of will which has brought me into my present situation. I could not believe, I cannot yet believe, that two families as noble in their principles as in their birth will conspire to condemn to death, both civilly and physically, a man so nearly connected with them, who has no doubt done wrong, but who cries aloud to both, 'I wish to reform my ways: put me in a position to do so.' Clemency is the greatest privilege of the generous. For those who have come to require it, it is perhaps the hardest to ask. But I am past considering what is agreeable or what is unpleasant to me. I consider only what I believe to be my duty, and it is certainly my duty to manifest to you my repentance for the real injuries I have done you, and by imploring your assistance to show you how great is my esteem and respect. To ask pardon of a man is to treat him as if he were God Himself. God never refuses pardon to those who ask it, and has He not enjoined men to grant it also even unto seventy times seven? I do not ask for complete forgiveness, sir, I wish for no gratuitous favours; I only ask to be put in a position to earn and merit them. I ask you to deliver me from death, and to give me the means of leading an honourable and virtuous life, and until I have used the first of your favours to repair my past, I do not expect you to grant me the rest. . . . The two families to which I belong, my two fathers, have been angered against me, but in spite of that I know them too well to believe that they are prepared to condemn me in cold

blood to a cruel and painful death. I know them too well not to flatter myself that they would be glad of my deliverance if they would be sure that it would not expose them to further injuries from me. I therefore venture to ask them to deliver my body and make trial of my mind. . . . I am not asking for complete liberty, but for the chance of earning it. I had thought in an interval of my sufferings that I might earn it in the wars, but my infirmities are too serious to admit of this. I would therefore ask you of your humanity to allow me to settle, under the double bond of a Royal order and of my word of honour, in a village near Paris, where I can be within reach of medical assistance, and can take some exercise, especially on horseback, which is regarded as the sole remedy (if indeed there is a remedy) for my complaints. I should remain there until cured, and I should try while there so to conduct myself that you would thereafter think it well to relieve me of the last of my bonds. Believe, sir, you are generous enough to believe, that I shall be much more firmly attached to my two families and to my duty, and much better restrained from further follies, by such a chain of benefits than by the drawbridges, the mighty walls and the iron gates of the fortress in which I live. I hope to receive an answer from you. I am asking you for my life, which I hope to lead in accordance with your wishes."

The firmness, the dignity and the emotion which are concentrated in this letter would be touching enough if its sincerity were beyond suspicion. Unfortunately it is only too certain that Mirabeau was playing a part, and that he was doing his best to play it well in order that the happy ending might come the faster. As the Bailli wrote to him, "if his talent for persuasion were less he would persuade more easily." Although compared to the Almighty in person, M. de Marignane refused to commit himself to any step, and contented himself with forwarding his son-in-law's letter to the Marquis de Mirabeau,

and with expressing the hope that the Marquis "might have sufficient confidence in his son to venture on the experiment."

Once more Mirabeau turned to his wife, who at last decided upon an intervention, which, owing to the death of the child born to her husband and Sophie, it was now easier to turn to account. This bereavement drew a poignant cry from Sophie. Mirabeau tried to console her terrible grief by the hope that they might have more children. "Oh how I wish that this might be so!" she wrote. "But who knows whether we shall again have this happiness? And if we had, could they repair this loss? She had cost us so much! The others could only be born in happier days!"

The same impression prevailed with those about Sophie at Gien, with those in contact with Mirabeau at Vincennes and even at Pontarlier, whence Mme. de Ruffey did not cease to send firm letters of good advice to her daughter, namely, that the death of Sophie's child must make it easier to regularize the position of the two prisoners. It did, in fact, help to precipitate the decision of the Marquis, who did not yet wish to appear in person, and therefore procured the intervention of Mme. du Saillant, whose letters he was careful to "lard with some good and mature reflections." This new negotiation, in which Mme. de Pailly and the Bailli participated, lasted some months longer. Fundamentally, what the Marquis wanted from his son was, on the one hand, that he should use his influence with his mother to arrange the family affairs for the best (Mirabeau had already tried this in the previous year), and on the other that he should lend himself to a complete reconciliation with his wife in order that there might be more children. Mirabeau was too anxious for his liberty and too much in need of it not to accept everything.

At the height of these negotiations he yielded to his

irresistible passion for intrigue by conducting a strange and mysterious correspondence with a young woman, a certain Mlle. Julie Dauvers, mistress of M. de La Fage, Secretary to Baudouin de Guémadeuc, a former Maître des Requêtes, who had been sent to Vincennes owing to misconduct. Mirabeau did not know Julie and had never seen her, but the strangeness of the affair only attracted him the more. He wrote to her and to her lover a series of agreeable, curious and amusing letters, in which, in order to maintain their interest and to secure their confidence, he boasted of his influence at Court, which he alleged was due to his relations (in the widest sense of the term) with the Princesse de Lamballe! In this odious pretence there is a delight in lying for its own sake, and a shameless cynicism which are positively revolting. It may be added that these letters, which have been published by M. Dauphin Meunier, who has added a vivacious and ingenious commentary, are full of *verve* and wit. We have in them a new Mirabeau, less emphatic and sententious than Sophie's correspondent. If, as I incline to think, it is impossible to know Mirabeau completely, these letters help us at least to know a little more about him.

At the desire of the Marquis de Mirabeau, whose request was seconded by the prisoner of Vincennes, a *lettre de cachet* in a hitherto unprecedented form was granted, which enjoined the Count "to retire to the place on which his father should decide." Thus the *Ami des Hommes* remained the master of the discipline to which he chose to submit his son, who henceforth was called simply "M. Honoré."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LAWSUITS AT PONTARLIER AND AT AIX

Mirabeau and his father: his stay at Le Bignon—Attempts at a reconciliation with the Comtesse de Mirabeau—The Pontarlier affair—Discussions and arrangements—Rupture with Sophie—The lawsuit at Aix—Mirabeau as a forensic orator—A masterpiece.

MIRABEAU left the keep on December 13, 1780, "naked as the day he was born." His brother-in-law, the Marquis du Saillant, went to Vincennes to meet him, and after spending a few days in the château with the surgeon-major, he took up his abode in Paris with Boucher, the employé of the secret police, whose kindness had ameliorated his lot in prison and whom he called "his good angel." He kept his word, and carried out the mission entrusted to him by his father, but he failed to persuade his mother, with whom he quarrelled and against whom he wrote a memoir—a sad counterpart of those he had formerly composed for her against his father! The Marquis, moreover, lost his case; the Grand Chambre du Parlement de Paris on May 15, 1781, pronounced a decree of separation in person and goods in favour of the Marquise. Mme. du Saillant communicated the news to the Comtesse de Mirabeau in the following terms: "I know too well your attachment to my unfortunate father, and all our family, not to feel sure of your keen sympathy in the misfortune which has just overtaken him. He has just lost his case against my mother, and the same judges who pronounced in his favour three years ago have now turned against him and have given a most extraordinary and unjust decision." At the same time she invited her sister-

in-law and "the good uncle" to Le Bignon to sustain the spirits of the old Marquis. These attentions had something to do with the plans of reconciliation which the latter had not abandoned. Mirabeau had associated himself with these by writing to his wife a curious note, hitherto unpublished, on the occasion of the commencement of the year 1781: "I begin this year, madame, under less unfavourable auspices than most of those which have preceded it. My bonds are broken, and by your hand. I beg you to believe, however, that I am not happy, and that there is only one form of happiness which would so far complete the others that they would merit the name. That is to deserve if possible that you should give me back all the rights which I formerly had to your affection. May this happy moment come some day. Till then, I shall have patience and shall console myself by prayers, very tender prayers, for your happiness which I shall not share.—Honoré."

The judicial misfortune suffered by the Marquis, the consequences of which for his fortune were serious, decided him to receive his son whom he had not seen for nearly nine years. He extended his hand to his son as to a friend, and observed that he had long since forgiven the enemy, and hoped one day to be able to bless the son. He wrote the Bailli a letter in which he described his impression of this interview: "I thought him much stouter, especially about the shoulders, the head and the neck. Apart from his restlessness, he has the family make and shape and gait. His hair is very fine, his forehead and eyes frank. There is much less affectation in his speech than there used to be, but there is still some; for the rest his manner is natural enough, and he is much less red in the face. . . ."

A week later Mirabeau suddenly disappeared. Some months previously, when his release seemed imminent, he had planned a visit to Sophie at the Convent of Gien. The moment for this foolhardy enterprise was ill-chosen.

Julie Dauvers had presented a petition to the Tribunal of the Marshals of France, which threatened to lead to his arrest and he decided to go. It was a mad and romantic escapade, but it was well managed and swiftly carried out, and it succeeded. Mirabeau gained admission to the convent on May 29, stayed with Sophie for five days and left again on June 2. His journey was intended to prepare Sophie for the breaking off of their relations. Since his liberation the rarity and the brevity of his letters, for which his excuses were always inadequate, had given the unfortunate lady a presentiment that this would be so. She sacrificed herself, giving her inconstant and frivolous lover this supreme proof of her affection. In the last month of his sojourn at Vincennes, Mirabeau had not contented himself with his audacious if platonic correspondence with Julie; he had had several more realistic affairs. While he was with Boucher he had several more, not counting one with the mistress of the house, a pretty rather unbalanced woman with artistic leanings, who did not refuse him what she had granted to so many others. In these matters he was incorrigible, without self-restraint, decency or delicacy, an accomplished seducer with a gift for lying which few women could resist. "Repulsively ugly as he is," observed the Marquis, "he excels in a pursuit in which the surest weapons are impudence and audacity."

His father took him to Le Bignon and kept him under observation. To stifle the scandal of the "billet d'honneur" for 500 livres, brought by Julie Dauvers before the Court of Marshals, he had sacrificed his gold snuff-box, the only article of value he possessed. He saw and he described his son's defects of character, his ingrained disorder, his taste for exaggeration, his effrontery, his charlatanry, his exuberance and his hypocrisy. In spite of his son's wildness, however, he felt that he was a good fellow, easy to live with, incapable of intentional

unkindness. "Despite his horrid ugliness," he wrote, "his halting gait, his breathless, turgid impetuosity and his outrageous conceit, something tells me that when he chooses to listen and to think he is more than a man of straw." Above all, though he regarded his son's knowledge as superficial and not altogether wrongly described him as "by instinct a pie and a jay," he was amazed at the breadth, the strength and the suppleness of his mind. At the time when Mirabeau was negotiating with his mother on his behalf, and when he could only judge of his son by his writings, the Marquis had already detected the eagle eye. Now that he saw him at close quarters, and knew him better, he found that he was practical and resourceful, that he had a great deal of talent, a strong will, a great power of working ardently and easily, and in fact that "he had a future before him."

This being so, the Marquis was constantly thinking how he could bring him and his wife together, how to bring him back to her, and how to "persuade her to come to the hook again." Some weeks before he lost his case, he wrote to the Comtesse to thank her for a consignment of oil. His letter was jocular in tone, but he allowed his daughter-in-law to see that he was obstinately attached to his favourite project. He jested about the mania for writing which characterized his family, contrasting it with the laziness of the Comtesse. "If my race were perpetuated by you as (with respect be it said) seemed to be your destiny, I think that the infusion of Marignane blood would be the best means of reducing, or even eradicating, this malady." He wished that his ancestors might have successors while those who surrounded his daughter-in-law were interested in keeping her childless, and he put forward his candidate boldly. "If any one ever takes upon himself to propose that you should have descendants, and that you should take the received means of procuring them, may good St. Yves keep him from being as

awkward in his solicitation as I should be. I know that henceforth I have no madman to present to you. I have not seen him, but I am following him very closely. He has been exposed to all sorts of trials, and has kept his self-control. I have myself tried him severely and I have found nothing but docility and obedience. As to his exterior, he is become a reserved, good-looking, even imposing figure, and has lost his agitated, discordant movements. All who have seen him, and they are many, are much pleased, for he has lived in the midst of snares of all kinds, reaping everywhere what he has sown and not ignorant of the depth of the abyss which he has escaped." (March 22, 1781.)

Some months later, Mirabeau himself made similar overtures to his wife. After excusing his silence on the ground of the "chaos of his affairs and the matters into which he had so suddenly been thrown, and by which he had been swept away," he added, "God forbid that this silence should be eternal. It is impossible that we should be strangers to each other. You were the mother of my son; you are my wife. And now that I see you with experienced eyes from which the scales have fallen, I hasten to add that I would not change even if I could. Our interests, if they have ceased to be identical, can never be contrary, and I shall not lightly renounce the hope of again finding in you a friend and a spouse and of being happy in the happiness I shall give and receive. My plans, my way of life, and my re-establishment in my family, are at last settled. I have gained that honour and happiness which promise so much and which perhaps I had no right to expect; my passions are quite calmed, and my heart is expanding in the bosom of a family from whom I have been estranged too long. I have regained that gentle way of life of which my errors and my misfortunes seemed to have deprived me for ever, and I owe it to you that I should tell you of my well-being and express my gratitude

to you who have contributed so much to it. It is for those who see me every day, who have me under their observation, who support and guide me and often speak to me of you—it is for them to say whether they think me less fit for that serene and peaceful existence than for the agitated existence to which the scourge of the Furies seemed to have doomed me. I feel and I confess that you have every right to prolong your attitude of caution. I am not unaware of all that evil tongues have said, and will continue to say of me. I have given them too much cause not to be resigned to that. But you are too just to believe lightly any but my natural judges and witnesses, who are assuredly incapable of deceiving you from any interested motive whatever." (Unpublished letter of August 22, 1781.)

It is impossible not to appreciate the force, the firmness, the artistic ingenuity and eloquence of this fine letter. The Comtesse de Mirabeau, however, could not allow herself to be deceived by her husband's professions, and doubtless she sent no reply. To the Bailli, who pressed her to relent, she declared that if her husband wished her to forget the past he should join the *Insurgents* and distinguish himself by some gallant action. Meanwhile she had made her re-entry into society; and was dancing, singing and acting for the delectation of the gay company of which she was an ornament.

It was now high time for Mirabeau to be thinking how he could avert the consequences of the sentence passed on him at Pontarlier if he was not to be overtaken by the completion of the period of five years, after which his condemnation to pay M. de Monnier 40,000 livres would become final. This period expired in May 1782, and it was all the more important for him to "get his head replaced on his shoulders," as the suspension or deprivation of his civil rights might be a weapon in the hands of M. de Marignane, who had threatened him with a suit for

separation from his wife. For several months Mirabeau had been studying with his lawyer the procedure for obtaining the cancellation of the sentence. The Ruffey family had fully empowered the Marquis to act for them.

Fortified by his father's instructions, and accompanied by des Birons, the husband of one of his mistresses whom he had transformed into a man of law, and by Legrain, a valet who was to serve him for the rest of his life, Mirabeau left for Pontarlier on February 2, 1782. After a short stay at Dijon, where des Birons obtained from Mme. de Ruffey a promise not to do anything to prevent a settlement, the party duly reached Pontarlier. An attempt to deal with M. de Monnier and his daughter Mme. de Valhadon, with whom he was now reconciled, in a haughty and almost threatening tone miscarried.

On February 12, Mirabeau surrendered as a "voluntary prisoner," and the case commenced. A series of questions was put to him, and with arrogant irony he denied everything, abduction, seduction ("which cannot be") and adultery ("which neither has nor can be proved"). He contradicted the witnesses, contested their impartiality, and (as regarded those who came from Switzerland) their right to be heard by a French court. Instead of obeying his father's counsels of moderation, he published passionate, eloquent and imprudent memoirs, in which he denounced "the partiality, the obscure connivance, the secret subornation, the vexatiousness in detail" which characterized the proceedings. He attacked successively Mme. de Valhadon, M. de Saint-Mauris, the witnesses, the judge, and the magistrate Sombarde, who, though a relation of M. de Monnier, had nevertheless figured in the case. His object was "to expose crimes and calumnies," to arouse public opinion in his favour, and to appeal to public opinion against judicial intrigues and decisions. The Council of Neuchâtel forbade the Swiss witnesses to testify as to the facts seen or known by them in their own country.

This was a success. On the other hand, the Parlement of Besançon on appeal refused his provisional release, which was a defeat and an evil omen.

Amid all these incidents no settlement was reached after three months of litigation. The Marquis was irritated at his son's attitude and anxious about the development of proceedings which threatened to ruin all his plans. He therefore sent du Saillant, a prudent person, to follow the case, not allowing himself to be led away by Mirabeau's "senseless ideas." Mirabeau was obstinate : he rejected any settlement unless the previous proceedings were quashed. He protested that no one had a right before God or man to interfere with his case against his will, without his knowledge or consent. At last, however, he gave way. An agreement was signed before two notaries at Besançon and was ratified on August 14 by the Bailli de Pontarlier. M. de Monnier agreed to consider void and of none effect the sentence pronounced against Mirabeau *in contumaciam* and to renounce all its results. His wife, sentenced to confinement in a convent till the end of the first year after her husband's death, was separated from him in person and estate. She was to receive back her dowry, and after M. de Monnier's death was to have an annual allowance for life of 1200 livres. It was strange enough that a civil agreement should be capable of annulling the consequences of a criminal prosecution : it was still more curious that in case the conditions were not carried out M. de Monnier or his heirs had the right to re-open the whole case !

They had no occasion. Sophie submitted with resignation to a sentence which separated her for ever from Mirabeau. Some months after her husband's death she removed to a small house near the convent. With her natural gentleness and generosity, she engaged in works of charity, to which she devoted most of her resources, and she was on the point of marrying an ex-captain of cavalry, who had no doubt been her lover, when he died suddenly.

On the very next day, September 9, 1789, Sophie committed suicide—a hapless victim of love. As she lighted the fatal brazier of charcoal she may have thought of the seal which Mirabeau had sent her twelve years before, on which was cut the brief and bold device, *A te principium, tibi desinet.* It was twice false; he had loved before he met her, and she was not the last of his loves.

After the settlement at Pontarlier, Mirabeau felt himself at a loss. He realized, it is true, that on the whole it was better than the prolongation of a scandalous case with all its distressing publicity. But his "turbulent disquiet" found nothing on which to work. What was he to do? How was he to employ his strength? Where was he to go? He felt that "he was under the censure of his father, forsaken, perhaps hated by his mother, suspected by his uncle, watched by his creditors, threatened by his wife, denuded of everything, position, money and credit." He did not exaggerate. Everywhere his errors and the memory of his misconduct rose up against him. He was trusted by no one. What he wanted, he cried, was a swordthrust. He spoke of abandoning his name and his country, but his father, whose dislike of him was not without penetration, was not deceived by the gusty caprices which passed through his mind, and he summed up his son's case in one of his shrewd remarks when he said of him, "he plays at passion and is at the same time its slave."

The mood passed, and, on reflection, Mirabeau decided to go to Neuchâtel to settle accounts with his publishers and to propose further business. This journey brought him into touch with Clavière and Duroveray, two democrats exiled from Geneva, from whom he learned much and who were afterwards to be of considerable use to him. Having been informed by them of the situation at Geneva he sent to M. de Vergennes, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, a very sagacious memorandum on the subject, the object and

spirit of which is shown by the following phrase: "The law of the stronger is the law of nations which we cannot hope will be respected except by the weakest among them."

His father now urged him to go to Provence to settle matters with his wife, and accordingly he arrived at Mirabeau on October 1. The Bailli, weary of his "insupportable arrogance," had made up his mind to show him no cordiality, and in fact the welcome he received was by no means warm. This coldness, however, did not last long, for the nephew soon found means to regain the confidence and affection of his uncle. The country people had received Mirabeau with *feux de joie* and every manifestation of delight. He was adored in this neighbourhood, and when his hour came this popularity was to be the main force behind his talents. At this point in his life his talents had not yet stirred the public, and he relied more on his all-conquering charm, which must never be forgotten by any one who wishes to understand Mirabeau or the secret of his success.

The Marquis wanted a settlement, not a lawsuit, and to secure a settlement he trusted to his son's abilities. He feared the violence and the scandal of a case in court, and he feared also a danger which it was only too easy to foresee. He had written too much! On the eve of his son's release, when his daughter-in-law and M. de Marignane gave their consent to Mirabeau's deliverance from Vincennes, the Marquis had given the following undertaking: "I give you my word of honour that my son will not, with my approval, approach your daughter unless by your orders or permission. Having reached my sixty-sixth year without deceiving anybody I shall not begin a career of perjury at my age." He was bound by this paper, which prevented him as a man of honour from lending himself to the commencement of proceedings for restitution of conjugal rights, or in any way to being a party to opposition to M. de Marignane's decision to keep the spouses

apart. The risk of being taken for a perjurer was not the only one he incurred, for he had furnished his adversaries with other weapons. "The fiend of scribomania," as the Bailli put it, had prompted him to write horrible letters in which he referred to his son as "an accomplished villain who should be erased from the memory of mankind," and had accused him, without proof, of the most perfidious and even criminal designs. These letters he had written to the Comtesse de Mirabeau and to M. de Marignane. They were no doubt confidential, but the temptation to make use of them was too great to be resisted.

The Count commenced operations immediately after his arrival at the Château de Mirabeau. Freedom had restored his audacity, and he behaved no longer like a captive imploring a favour, but as a husband claiming his rights. He wanted his wife, and addressed his demands to herself; she resisted, and gave the Bailli to understand that as a dutiful and obedient daughter, her duty was to stay with her father, and that on no consideration whatever would she live with M. de Mirabeau. Her husband insisted and appealed to his right to "his most precious possession, the only one which henceforth could adorn his life." The Marquis de Marignane replied that the courts would pronounce on his rights to that possession. The Bailli intervened. He had been a party to the undertaking entered into by his brother; nevertheless, honest man though he was, he stooped to a casuistical explanation of this document. But neither his entreaties nor his visits nor the innumerable letters which Mirabeau wrote in varying tones, nor plans for conference, nor even an attempt the husband made to see his wife, had the slightest effect. Months passed and Mirabeau had only the alternatives of raising the siege or taking the position by storm. He chose the latter course. On February 28, he formally summoned his wife to return to the domestic hearth. She retorted by a demand for a separation. And thus com-

menced a case, the incidents and the consequences of which were destined to make it one of the most famous in judicial history.

At the outset of the proceedings the parties were unequally matched. Everything was on the side of the wife. She was the adored queen of a brilliant society. She had money, power, and influence, and the inestimable advantage of a family connection with the judicature. Not content with securing for her side the biting eloquence of a young advocate named Portalis, whose already established reputation had been enhanced by a recent *cause célèbre,* she was clever enough to approach all the other eminent counsel and prevent them from taking part in the case. Her adversary was head over ears in debt, a man who had been twice condemned, who was more celebrated for his transgressions than for his achievements, for his imprisonment than for his talent, a rebellious son, a notoriously and insolently unfaithful husband, a debauchee to whom all doors were closed. He had neither resources, nor authority, nor credit; he was on bad terms with the Government, which he had attacked, and he appeared to be at her mercy.

Everything indeed was apparently against him. But he was a man capable of brushing everything aside. Nothing daunted him, and in the struggle which he knew to be decisive he had in his favour incomparable gifts lavished on him by nature, a powerful and lucid intellect, an eagle eye, a supple and ingenious wit, a strong and striking voice, and an eloquence of which it can only be said that it was all that eloquence can be. Hitherto he had been merely a writer; he had no experience of speaking. But he knew himself; he had taken his own measure and he felt what he was to become. At Pontarlier he had been deeply moved by the peroration of one of his memoirs. "If this," he wrote, "is not eloquence of a kind unknown to this age of slavery, then I do not know what that

precious and attractive gift may be." But in fact he did not yet know his own power. Eloquence must face the test of an audience, of debate and interruption, of the atmosphere of a public contest. The opportunity came, he seized it; he lost his case, but he proved that he was an orator beyond compare.

The case, however, was not lost at once. The tribunal was composed of the Lieutenant de la Sénéchaussée sitting with two assessors. On March 20, he claimed that his wife should not remain with her father during the hearing of the case. If she would not return to him he claimed that she should temporarily retire to a convent. He was moderate and conciliatory, and this alone won over the public. He moved the audience even to tears, and quite disconcerted M. de Marignane, who had sneered at the opening of his address. His reply was skilful and his demand was agreed to. His adversaries appealed to the Parlement and refused settlement by consent. Mirabeau had published his wife's letters and after each affectionate passage he inscribed this simple and decisive comment, "Mme. de Mirabeau since she wrote this has never seen her husband from whom it is said that she wishes to be separated." The repetition of this phrase produced a tremendous effect, but the publication of intimate correspondence of this kind challenged and justified reprisals. The other side did not hesitate; they inserted in a memoir the letters in which the Marquis de Mirabeau picturesquely and insultingly dissected his son. They were deadly, and the Bailli, who was quite overwhelmed by them, wrote to his brother, "What put it into your head to say all that you did, and to add that I have proof of it, which is not the case?" One quotation is enough to show their tenor: "Ape, wolf, or fox, all parts are alike to him; he can assume them all without effort." It was in vain that before the trial the Marquis, in order to avoid a scandal, had appealed to his daughter-in-law's compassion in a melan-

choly and moving letter, and to M. de Marignane's prudence and good faith in an angry and indignant communication. His son's impetuosity broke down all barriers.

At the end of May the case, which was awaited with impatience, came before the Grand Chamber of the Parlement. Portalis, assured of a tribunal in which the Marignane family had friends and even allies, made a searching attack on Mirabeau. He gave an *ex parte* account of the terrible vicissitudes of his opponent's life, and ended a violently aggressive speech with the direct thrust: "It is better to be defamed than to be praised by you."

Mirabeau had several days in which to prepare his reply, and he did not lose his time. On June 2, before an audience which had shouldered the guards aside, broken the barriers, invaded the doors, and even occupied the windows, he made a speech which lasted for five hours. "He spoke, or rather he howled, and roared so much," said his father, "that the lion's mane dripped with sweat and whitened with foam." He was an improvised advocate, but his speech was no improvisation, and his voice was the most eloquent ever heard in a court of justice. He enriched the history of forensic eloquence with a masterpiece. Almost nothing in it is out of date. The lucid and logical solidity of the argument, the contagious vivacity, the restrained irony, the vehement and fiery indignation of the language defy time. From his judges, whom he knew to be prejudiced, and whom he could not hope to convince, Mirabeau appealed to his fellow countrymen, whom he took to witness, and to public opinion, the strength of which he divined, and in which he was already finding the source and substance of his power.

The unity of this speech is such, and the connection of the parts is so close that it is difficult to quote from it, and it is almost impossible to analyze. It transcends the incident which occasioned it, and goes to the root of

the matter. "The petty warfare of a public prosecutor is beneath a spirit inflamed with passion." How could he explain the dangers of allowing Mme. de Mirabeau to remain in her father's house without explaining what her father was, what sort of a house he kept, what sort of person she was herself? Mirabeau explains all this, and what he cannot say he insinuates, and his reticences and his allusions are perhaps even more convincing than what he expresses in precise terms. "You will hear," he cries, "how she has been seen out walking without her father, in company without her father, at the play without her father. . . . She has been seen making herself very agreeable to an unmarried man. Has not experience shown that temptations are a trial to virtue, and that the misfortune of succumbing to such temptation is too often the penalty of the presumption which voluntarily exposes itself to them. Do I insult Mme. de Mirabeau by reminding her of this fact more than she would insult herself by showing that she had not forgotten it?"

The publication of the letters from his father, "the old man of genius," whom they had not shrunk from wounding, incited him to a remarkable piece of audacity. In them he had been denounced, and his feelings outraged; but his anger did not turn against their author. He had not the breadth of mind to discern the truth, "because he was merely repeating from a distant spot the gossip which afflicted his fatherly heart, the gossip which so many rash and rancorous tongues in this province have echoed, and which I will certainly track to its source. So that my calumniators in attesting my father's letters are in most cases attesting only what they say themselves." He sets out the eight grievances alleged against him. "Let us take breath and answer," he says. One by one he takes them up, presses them to their utmost, and analyzes them, neglecting no detail of what he describes as "the defamatory romance" of Mme. de

Mirabeau. What he cannot deny he explains away, and when he makes an admission with what irony he characterizes the part taken in the facts by others! One day, it is said, he was drunk, "but so were many others, as M. de Marignane will no doubt remember." He had been unfaithful to his wife. "Ah, but our manners are not so pure that we have the right to regard a man as infamous who is suspected or even convicted of adultery!" He has repented of his faults, and "what heart of iron has the right to refuse pardon to a young man in love?" Mme. de Mirabeau says she has been calumniated—she shall be her own judge, and thereupon he read the letter written by his wife to her lover to break off their relations, adding, "meanwhile, while Mme. de Mirabeau is preparing an explanation of this letter, which appears to me to require none, I may inform M. Portalis that in spite of his magniloquent challenges I have in my portfolio writings of more than one kind, all of which are very proper to sustain and amplify with many episodes the romance with which he will no doubt embellish this communication."

Mirabeau, by throwing this letter into the case, dared and risked everything: he had no longer anything to lose. He turned on Portalis, whom he accused of cowardice in writing without having the courage to sign the infamous libels in which his father was outraged. He respects the noble profession of the Bar. "But if a member of it, under cover of the impunity allowed to be due to a profession whose independence is its very life . . . instead of eloquence vomits forth insulting declarations, lies, fury and calumny, if he invents or distorts facts, if he garbles or falsifies all the documents he quotes, and takes care not to read what he is quoting in order to preserve for himself the excuse that his memory is defective, such a man sinks from the freest of all situations, and becomes enslaved to the most servile of passions.

Martial has named him for me—he is a merchant of words, of lies and slander. . . ." This terrible apostrophe proved too much for Portalis, who was carried out of court in a swoon at the end of the sitting.

Mirabeau, moreover, had made up his mind to leave nothing unsaid, and he carried out his intention. He knew that his judges were partial, and with supreme audacity he turned this to account. While he affirmed his respect for their virtue, he hurled a challenge in their teeth. "Finally, my lords, men already dare to announce what the judgment in this ill-starred case will be. Yes, the confidence of my adversaries is such that they have no care even for appearances, and, unless they said openly that they mean to dictate the judgment, they could not more clearly proclaim that they have the Supreme Court in their pockets. This blasphemy does not appal me. Rather, it redoubles my confidence. I expect from the court a judgment all the more equitable because it is common knowledge that my adversaries are honoured with the friendship and alliance of a very large number of my judges. They will mete out justice, not to their alliances, not to the private entreaties that may be addressed to them, but to the arguments that have been advanced before them; and no doubt they know too well in what the true greatness of a judge consists to descend from their tribunal where they would leave both dignity and virtue behind them, and degrade themselves to the level of the litigants between whom they have to judge!"

From the effect still produced by these words, which have lost the warmth and colour imparted to them by the voice, the gestures and the accent of the speaker, it is easy to judge of the effect they produced, seconded by the commanding stature, the burning eyes, and the powerful organ of Mirabeau. The public rapturously applauded. Joubert, Mirabeau's counsel, next spoke, demanding the restitution of the Marquis's letters, and after him Portalis,

who was moderate for reasons of policy; then, on June 17, Mirabeau made a second speech. Although a projected compromise embarrassed him in his choice of means, he was not inferior to himself. He was heard a third time in order that he might have the pleasure of refuting by anticipation the conclusions of the advocate-general, whose pleadings he had succeeded in obtaining, and whom he completely disconcerted. Finally, on July 5, the court gave judgment both on the specific point and on the whole case. Mme. de Mirabeau obtained a judicial separation and restitution of the Marquis's letters was refused.

On the very day of the judgment Mirabeau challenged the Comte de Gallifet, whom he accused of having taken his wife's part with too much warmth, and slightly wounded him in the arm. Before the judgment the Marquis had written: "It is beyond question that he has turned public opinion, which is now for the most part in his favour. That is the common view here, and it is supported by letters from the scenes of the trial, both from Grenoble and from Avignon. The curious thing is that I hear the same thing from Italy. What glory for the descendant of our ancestors!" He would have preferred success in the case to the glory which he mentions with so much irony. He was disappointed and angry, and saw in this final stroke of fate the ruin of all his hopes. He refused to see his son, and surrendered to the Minister the Royal order which placed him in his power. "His ways are not my ways," he declared, "my task is complete and finished. It is now for him to take henceforth the course he thinks fit. I can no longer either help him, or guide him, or be responsible for him." Thus left to himself Mirabeau profited by his liberty to forget the Bailli, which was the basest ingratitude on his part, and to enter an appeal against the judgment, which was dismissed. In support of his plea he had written a memoir, the publication of

which was forbidden, in February 1784, by M. de Miromesnil the Keeper of the Seals. With him Mirabeau had a somewhat warm discussion, which he printed at Maestricht as an introduction to the prohibited memoir. The Minister avenged himself by allowing the document to circulate.

## CHAPTER VII

### MADAME DE NEHRA

Money difficulties—Madame de Nehra—Journey to England—Financial polemics—Collaborations—Mirabeau and Beaumarchais.

MIRABEAU had now broken with his father, and, having no more to expect from him, did not think it necessary to humour him any longer. He therefore sued him for an account of his guardianship, and obtained an annual allowance for his subsistence of 3000 livres, which was not subject to any deductions. The remainder of the property at issue remained subject to dispute and litigation, the Marquis alleging that his son owed him very large sums of money advanced by him both for the purpose of having him pursued and arrested, and for his maintenance at Vincennes.

Reduced to the pittance of 3000 livres, Mirabeau, who did not receive a penny in advance, saw that he would have some difficulty in making a living. In May 1784 he had written to Vitry, a new friend whose acquaintance he had made at Boncheis after his release, to ask for a loan of ten francs, "which I must have, and for which, on my honour, I do not know where to turn." Some days later he pledged at the Mont de Piété his "coat embroidered with silver, and his half-mourning vest and breeches of cloth of silver, and winter laces." On a reconciliation with his mother, he had contracted conjointly with her a loan from a money-lender of 30,000 livres, of which he had as usual the lion's share, for he got 19,000 livres, and she only 2000. With his habitual prodigality and almost incredible carelessness about money matters, he had taken

up his abode in the Chaussée d'Antin, and was living there sumptuously with hired furniture. Indeed his conduct, though it did not excuse all his father's methods of dealing with him, proved how little this great baby was capable of being left to himself, and how much he needed a guide or a guardian. At this juncture his good fortune provided him with a guardian angel in the shape of Mme. de Nehra, whom he had met in the spring of 1784 while visiting a married woman with whom he was carrying on an intrigue, and whom he pretended was his cousin.

Mme. de Nehra was the natural daughter of Willem van Haren, an eminent Dutch statesman. She had been brought up by his brother at Zwolle, in the province of Overykel, and after the death of her father and her uncle she had retired to the fashionable convent of the Petites Orphelines at Paris. It was there that Mirabeau by chance made her acquaintance. She was only seventeen, pretty, blonde, fragile and fresh-coloured, gentle and good-tempered. Her angelic physiognomy and her magical powers of seduction fascinated the monster from whose ugliness she at first recoiled in terror: little by little she grew accustomed to his features, which seemed appropriate to the character of his wit. She came to see that "his face was expressive, his mouth charming, and his smile full of grace." Mirabeau's eloquence, which even in its highest flights he knew how to invest with an irresistible charm, completed the conquest. At first there was no more than an affectionate friendship between them. Mme. de Nehra accompanied Mirabeau to Belgium, where he went to get his *Memoir* printed: she returned his mistress. "At this time," she says, "everything was against him; family, friends, and fortune, all had abandoned him. He had nothing left but me, and I wished to fill the place of all. I therefore sacrificed every plan which was incompatible with our relations: I gave up my quiet life to share the perils which surrounded him in his stormy career, and I

swore thenceforth to live for him alone, to follow him everywhere, and to expose myself to everything in order to help him in good or evil fortune."

When a woman of such a character surrenders herself she gives up body and soul. Mme. de Nehra did not take back what she had given, and though Mirabeau afterwards sacrificed her, he loved her long, and as he had never loved before. Sophie had inspired in him an ardent passion, in which his mind and his senses were engaged but not his heart. This time his heart was concerned. "Your portrait," he wrote, "your image, my memories, my prayers, my dreams—all this is you, indeed, but you who were here and are now absent! I have been in love; I love my friends dearly, but never has any one made me feel as I feel to-day this entire confidence, this reciprocation of all my sentiments and faculties, this existence in you which makes me feel that I can never live except through you." In all the secret correspondence from Vincennes there is not a single phrase which gives as this does the feeling of true tenderness, complete surrender, and, in a word, of a sincere and profound love. Mirabeau took the two final syllables of his fair friend's Christian names, Henriette Amélie, and made of them a curious and pretty pet name, *Yet-Lie*, by which he always called her. She set his house in order, made him sell his horses and his carriage, and surrounded his labours with affection and comfort. He was at this time preparing a work on the Order of Cincinnatus, which had been founded in the United States for the officers who had taken part in the War of Independence. The occasion of this work was a pamphlet which Franklin had allowed him to translate; but fearing that M. de Miromesnil might change his mind, and hearing even (though no doubt falsely) that a *lettre de cachet* was about to be launched against him, Mirabeau decided to leave France.

Accompanied by Mme. de Nehra, he left for London in

MADAME DE NEHRA

(*From a miniature belonging to M. Gabriel Lucas de Montigny*)

August 1784, and there he renewed acquaintance with the brothers Elliot, whom he had known at the Pension Choquard, and who had not forgotten him. One of these, Gilbert, who was the first to receive him, was struck by his talents and his knowledge; but if Mirabeau's intellect seemed to him more mature, he found that his character had not altered. He describes him as "ardent and positive in his conversation, awkward in his manners, ugly of countenance, clumsy in person and dirty in apparel as ever, and withal as self-sufficient as we remember him twenty years ago at school." Mirabeau made the acquaintance of Samuel Romilly the jurist, of Lord Shelburne, afterwards Marquis of Lansdowne, of the Duke of Richmond, of Dr. Price and of Burke. Brissot, afterwards his friend, was then in London, editing the *Courrier d'Europe*. Mirabeau spent eight months in London, but neither the country nor its political constitution appealed to him. "The land of wine," he said, "is better than the land of coal—even from the point of view of its influence on one's moral nature." Perhaps his failure to realize the diplomatic and journalistic ambitions by which he was then and thenceforth obsessed had something to do with his disillusionment.

His *Considerations on the Order of Cincinnatus* appeared in London. This book, with which he was well pleased, like all the others which he wrote at this time, raises the question how far he was helped by collaboration. In his *Souvenirs* Dumont observes that Mirabeau "found himself absolutely incapable of a sustained piece of writing unless he was supported and guided by a previous work which he could borrow." All the contemporary evidence is in agreement on this point. This orator of genius wrote with difficulty, and found it hard to get in train. He was a good writer only in so far as he was a great orator. The passages of his books which have had merit enough to survive are those which have the form, the movement and

the development of oratory, and they bear out Dumont when he says, "If one considers him as an author it must be agreed that all his works, without exception, are pieces of marqueterie, in which little would remain if each of his colleagues took back the share he contributed. He had the gift, however, of imparting a greater brilliancy to whatever he touched himself, and of scattering here and there flashes of vivid insight, original expressions, and apostrophes full of fire and eloquence." His *Considerations on the Order of Cincinnatus* were a sharp criticism of the institution in a republic of a hereditary nobility. Chamfort greatly assisted Mirabeau in the preparation of this work, but it is impossible to determine the extent of his collaboration. There is a passage on "the gilded patriciate," the "fine oratorical movement of which" was praised by Mirabeau himself. The passage, which, in fact, was his own, is excellent, and what he says therein about ribands and decoration has lost none of its force or, alas! of its truth.

Another book, inspired by a letter of Clavière's and entitled *Doutes sur la liberté de l'Escaut,* appeared early in 1785. On the occasion of a project, attributed to the Emperor Joseph II, of restoring to his subjects in Brabant their freedom to navigate the Escaut, Mirabeau considered not only the interests of the Dutch, whose independence he defended, but the European situation. This piece of occasional writing shows Mirabeau's gift for foreign affairs. Had it not been for his disorderly life he might have been a great diplomatist. One of his favourite ideas was that there should be a cordial and final *rapprochement* between England and France. In a letter to La Fage, towards the end of his sojourn at Vincennes, he had already written, "If there is a fine plan in the world it is that which would associate the greatness of France and England, founding their tremendous power on a basis of equity." In this book on the Escaut he urged the signature of a commercial treaty

which would "make national jealousies disappear for ever," and "lead to an alliance solid, sincere and everlasting."

An irritating, absurd and humiliating lawsuit with his valet and secretary Hardy had added to the difficulties of Mirabeau's stay in London, and he found it necessary to leave. Mme. de Nehra took certain steps with the Baron de Breteuil, Minister of the Royal Household, the result of which was to convince Mirabeau that he could re-enter France without being molested, and he accordingly returned to Paris on April 1, 1785. His first intention seems to have been to take up his quarters at Mirabeau. "We have the means of going to Provence," he wrote to Mme. de Nehra, "and assuredly the means of living there, since at Manosque Mme. de Mirabeau, her son and the nurse, a maid, a cook, a manservant and myself lived well enough on the sum in question." It was Mme. de Nehra's idea. She thought that a year or two of retirement, during which Mirabeau might complete a great work, would be of much advantage to him. But would his creditors have left him in peace? Another consideration (the illness of a child of the sculptor Lucas de Montigny, whom he had adopted) prevented his departure, and the efforts made by Clavière, whom Mirabeau had known at Neuchâtel, were finally successful in keeping him in Paris. Clavière had a profound knowledge of economic and financial questions, but he was timid, and he felt that his rather faded talent required the help of the boldness and the brilliancy of Mirabeau, who, he said, "had the head of a great man." Clavière introduced Mirabeau to the great financier Panchaud, banker to the Court, who was engaged in speculation on a great scale, and who fascinated Mirabeau by his skill and his "eagle eye."

From these two men Mirabeau learned the art of finance, though, to be accurate, he had begun to interest himself in it in London, where he studied the famous *Compte rendu de Necker*. Through them he was also brought into touch

with M. de Calonne, and in six months he published five works, of which the first, entitled the *Caisse d'Escompte,* appeared five or six weeks after his return from London.

Extraordinary and even prodigious as were Mirabeau's powers of assimilation and of output, a fertility involving the production of long pamphlets founded on very serious study, would be inexplicable if the nature of his methods of work was not known. Brissot said, not without reason, "Mirabeau was almost always an *impresario.* As an author he had, as he said himself, a special talent for delivering Clavière, with whose ideas he was so saturated that he made them his own, and imparted to them a flavour of originality." The *Caisse d'Escompte,* if we may believe Brissot, came from this source; it was followed by four other works, *The Bank of Spain, known as the Bank of St. Charles, Letter to M. le Couteulx de la Noraye on the Bank of Spain and on the Caisse d'Escompte, On the Shares of the Compagnie des Eaux of Paris, Answer to the author of the Administrators of the Compagnie des Eaux of Paris.* The titles of these books are enough to show that they were polemical and occasional in character, and they have now no interest except for the student of the financial history of the eighteenth century. An analysis of them would be apt to run into a discussion of the financial operations of Panchaud, with whom Mirabeau spent most of his time, or of the economic writings of Clavière. When the pamphlet against the Compagnie des Eaux appeared, though it was signed in big letters with the name of Mirabeau, it was Clavière who was summoned before the Lieutenant of Police, and it is known practically to a certainty that the first attack on the Bank of St. Charles was drafted by Brissot and Clavière.

The Marquis, always vigilant, wrote of his son: "This gentleman is now in the pay of the speculators; they use him as one uses an ill-conditioned, dangerous cur, which is set on to bark at the heels of the passers-by, and is

always ready to snap when he is bidden." Mirabeau admits that he received assistance from friends, "who backed his opinions," but was he paid by Calonne, whose policy and whose interests he supported in the first two books mentioned above? He has vehemently denied it, and in this case there is nothing which would justify us in doubting his word. In order to enrich himself he had only to be silent, and it was no exaggeration when he said that he "could sway the pendulum of the Bourse as he wished, and that his silence was worth its weight in gold." The Comte de La Marck, whose testimony has high moral authority, states that the Bank of St. Charles went so far as to make Mirabeau the most tempting propositions, on condition that he did not publish his attack, but that Mirabeau declined them. His action is all the more meritorious as he had had to send all that he had to his Mont de Piété in order to obtain the means of livelihood. Alas, that we must add that he sold to Calonne as his own a Memoir on Municipalities lent to him by Dupont (de Nemours) on the occasion of one of his visits to Vincennes!

The affair of the Compagnie des Eaux was the occasion of a dispute between Mirabeau and Beaumarchais. The company was attacked by the former and defended by the latter. The *Mirabelles,* as the author of the *Barbier de Seville* observed, did not have the best of a duel in which wit was the deadliest weapon. "It is for a discredited advocate," said Beaumarchais, "to plead everything when he despairs of his case. An eloquent man has everything to lose when he ceases to respect himself, and eloquent my opponent assuredly is." He also asserted that the author of the pamphlet he was attacking "was in the power of operators known to have the strongest interest in the fall of the market." Mirabeau replied by developing his thesis, and then devoted a long page, full of treacherous insinuations, to Beaumarchais himself. Some phrases in it would be amusing enough if Mirabeau had not the cynical

audacity to pose as the champion of morality. "Every order in the State," he wrote, "every class in society, every law, every rule, every decency of life is lacerated, insulted, outraged." This allusion to the audacities of the *Mariage de Figaro* comes somewhat surprisingly from the pen of its author, who four years later, by his power of speech, was to transform the words of Beaumarchais into deeds. Mirabeau is more pleasing in a less virtuous and more natural pose.

He was far, however, from lacking either wit or *finesse*. Lucas de Montigny in his *Memoirs*, the documents in which (though they should be received with caution) are always so valuable, has published a letter which Mirabeau meant to send to Calonne, and which was such as "never stipendiary wrote to his master." His friends prevented its being printed, and Mirabeau's audacity never got beyond the stage of intention. It would, however, be a pity not to give a specimen of its quality. There are delightful things in it. Mirabeau had a great gift for mishandling ministers. In his *Lettres de Cachet* there is to be found the following curious passage, which is perhaps not even yet quite out of date: "I take it that ministers, for the most part new men whose position is transitory and precarious, and who have everything to gain and almost nothing to lose, are in haste to push their brief authority as far as they can in order that they may make their fortunes rapidly, that they may provide themselves with instruments, that they may realize their desires. They must profit by the instant as it flies—to-morrow they will have ceased to be. . . ." Is the following amusing apostrophe applicable only to M. de Calonne? "You are very clever, sir—clever enough at least to deceive both yourself and others. People are too ready to believe that you know all that you understand, that you understand all that you listen to so attentively with that clever and cunning expression in your eyes, that they can easily persuade you to do what has

been demonstrated to you. They are much mistaken. Your only care is to strike an attitude, mental and physical, which flatters your self-love, which increases your enjoyment of the most trifling vanities, which helps you to escape from the difficulties of the moment, which will ensure that you will be minister to-morrow, without reckoning how you will be minister in a week's time. You want not advice but expedients, not friends but advertisers, not truth but panegyric. Provided that your society—I had almost said your clique—offers up the requisite amount of incense, that those whose interests you serve do not reproach you, and that nothing distracts you from your pleasures, things are going well enough. You put off for months and months, and then you take an hour to decide what requires the most sustained attention and the most profound consideration. In a word, we should deceive ourselves with a pleasant fiction if we pretended to believe that your policy has any object but the success of your intrigues and the satisfaction of the interest of your most trifling passions." "That mountebank Beaumarchais," as he called him, could not have put it better himself.

This violent pamphlet was written at Berlin. His campaign against the Compagnie des Eaux had almost led to an open breach with Calonne, whose interests and connections it threatened. He had had a lively interview with the minister, and the situation was becoming difficult. On the advice of his friends, the Abbé de Périgord and the Duc de Lauzun, he decided to leave France for a time.

## CHAPTER VIII

### MIRABEAU IN GERMANY

Interviews with Frederick the Great—Mirabeau and Talleyrand—Views on foreign policy—The Berlin Correspondence: its historical and literary importance—Ambitions and disappointments.

MIRABEAU left for Berlin at the end of 1785. Mme. de Nehra, who accompanied him, relates that between Toul and Verdun several pistol shots were fired at their carriage, and she could not tell whether it was a practical joke or a serious attempt on their lives. She also relates that at Frankfort-on-the-Main Mirabeau had "an intrigue of gallantry." At Paris she had already become aware of his infidelities. If he but saw a pretty face; if "a woman made him the least advances, he took fire at once." But as she was sure of his heart that was enough to satisfy her affection, and she resigned herself to the caprices of his temperament.

After making some stay at Leipsic, where he frequented the society of the savants of the place, Mirabeau arrived at Berlin about the middle of January 1786. M. de Vergennes, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, had given him a letter of introduction to the French Ambassador, Count d'Esterno, whose reception of him was, to say the least of it, reserved. Mirabeau, with confident boldness, applied directly for an audience with Frederick II. The great king granted it at once and received him kindly, though he forgot next day the disguised offer of service which his visitor had made in a written petition. His brother, Prince Henry, was very cordial, was, at first at any rate, by no means offended at Mirabeau's familiarity, and without

making him a confidant showed interest in his talents and was pleased to be amused with his manners and his wit.

When he went to Germany, Mirabeau intended to carry out the idea which had been in his mind while he was in England, of writing a sort of periodical, containing a summary of all that was essential in contemporary science and literature. This plan came to nothing, but, always anxious to seize on the topic of the moment, he wrote a letter about Cagliostro and Lavater, who were then much in vogue owing to the affair of the Queen's necklace. In this letter he attacked the sect of the *illuminati* who had great influence with the German princes, and opposed to their pretensions the benefits of a rationalistic philosophy. In this fugitive piece nothing deserves to be recalled but a precise allusion to "a revolution which is ever becoming more necessary in our legal system," the principles of which he had already laid down in his *Lettres de Cachet*. "An accused person," he said, "must be tried according to the most regular forms. His imprisonment must be according to law. His detention should also be according to law: it should be humane, and even gentle. He should have advice, help, the means of defence. He should be made aware of everything which can contribute to his exculpation. . . ."

The chief advantage which Mirabeau derived from this first visit to Berlin was the friendship which he formed there with distinguished persons, such as Sir James Murray, Ewart the Secretary of the British Embassy, and particularly Dohm, the historian, philosopher and economist, to whom he owed much. He was interested in everything, and questioned everybody, from the ministers down to artisans. An eminent lady named Rahel remembered him very vividly. "His slightest movements," she said, "showed that he was a man full of energy, who examined everything at first hand, who desired to know everything, and to get to the bottom of all things." Dohm has left an

equally characteristic impression. "He carried the art of putting questions to such a pitch, that it is difficult to convey an idea of it to any one who was not accustomed to his conversation."

Recalled to France by his personal affairs, Mirabeau had a second audience, on April 17, with Frederick, who, though he was very ill, kept him for nearly an hour, and produced a profound impression on him. At Brunswick he did not succeed in seeing the reigning Duke who was "so interesting to meet, from every point of view." He had left his "horde" at Berlin. The letters he wrote to Mme. de Nehra there show great tenderness, and a delicacy of sentiment revealing genuine affection. When he reached Paris the affair of the necklace was exciting universal and passionate interest. Mirabeau was favourable to the Cardinal de Rohan, but he was under no illusions as to the far-reaching effects likely to be produced by this horrible scandal. "Destiny is a strange thing," he wrote, "hell has never belched forth more perilous corruptions than there are in this business. What a country! What men! What degeneracy! What corruption!"

Corruption he found everywhere. Of the Abbé de Périgord, the future Talleyrand, he wrote to his beloved Yet-Lie: "He has often spoken to me of the declared passion which he had for you, and I confess that in it all there was a perfidious cunning which made me detest him. For the rest he is still in the highest favour, and is constantly losing in consideration and in wit what he gains in suppleness and courtiership." Mirabeau had met the Abbé de Périgord at the house of the banker Panchaud. Their characters and temperaments were antagonistic, but they were brought together by their interests and their ambitions. Talleyrand, who then occupied the high position of Agent-General to the Clergy, was interested in diplomatic questions and in financial affairs, and from

this double point of view it was possible that Mirabeau might be useful to him at Berlin. He contrived to persuade M. de Calonne to entrust him with a mission, and a report written by Mirabeau on June 2, 1786, on the European situation, no doubt helped to secure this result. With its deliberate conciseness this report is a memoir of remarkable power, which gives a striking picture of France exhausted and indecisive contrasted with England and Prussia. "Is it not time," he concludes, "that we re-established our affairs abroad and revictualled our people at home?" And Mirabeau once again, with a persistency in which we must recognize a definite policy, urged the desirability of an offensive and defensive alliance with England.

He arrived at Berlin on July 21. Immediately after his departure, and while he was still on the journey, he sent off his first dispatch. His last was written on the very day of his return, and is dated January 19, 1787. In the intervening six months, Mirabeau sent off about seventy dispatches, which were received, deciphered, and corrected by Talleyrand, and submitted to Calonne, Vergennes, and the King himself. He had no official mission. He lived, amassed information, and worked outside the regular diplomatic system. This subordinate and unacknowledged position embarrassed him, and not less so the French Ambassador, who several times expressed surprise and even resentment. It must be admitted that, making allowances for Mirabeau's characteristic exaggerations, the comparison of the dispatches on events of importance, is not in favour of the Comte d'Esterno. The semi-official envoy saw further and clearer than the official ambassador, and he wrote in a very different style. No one but Mirabeau could have produced the dispatches. His whole self is in them, his extraordinary clear-sightedness, his wide knowledge, his avowed or unconscious cynicism. They have led some to compare him with Saint-Simon, but this is to do him too much honour. Some happy formulæ, some

original phrases, some descriptions boldly dashed on the paper are not enough to make him the equal of the prodigious artist who indeed "wrote satanic and immortal pages." Mirabeau has none of Saint-Simon's brilliancy and high relief, none of his concentrated power nor his picturesque and mordant vigour, which in a few characteristic touches fixes a character and focuses a man.

But though he falls far short of this unique genius his talent has its place, and the rank which Mirabeau holds by virtue of the letters from Berlin is not to be despised. His account of Frederick's death and funeral is well observed and well expressed. Portraits such as he gives of Frederick William II, Prince Henry of Prussia, and the Duke of Brunswick, in spite of some exaggerations, remain worthy of the dignity of history. His description of the Prussian Court, that hotbed of base intrigue, bitter jealousy, lamentable weakness and degrading vice, is lively, animated and full of colour, and on the whole, is so like the reality that it would be unjust to regard it as a partisan view suggested by ignorance or spite. The refutation attempted by Baron Trenck is often an unconscious and sufficient proof of its truth. Mirabeau's language is precise and clear, never declamatory, and it is purged of the overemphasis which elsewhere pervades and spoils his best work. If he speaks as a diplomatist is expected to speak, he sees as French diplomacy (which he described as the most inactive in Europe) was then rarely capable of seeing. The Dutch question developed on lines different from those on which he predicted under the influence of the confidences of the Duke of Brunswick. But he expressed views on the failure of certain parts of the achievements of Frederick the Great, on the decadence and revival of Prussia to which the most scientific historians have done full justice. On the Crown Prince he pronounced a judgment which M. Albert Sorel describes as a "presentiment of genius"; and indeed his prediction that, after Frederick William II,

Frederick William III would arise to repair his errors and reconstitute Prussia, is very striking. "Perhaps this young man," he said, "has a great destiny, and if he should become the pivot of some memorable revolution, far-seeing men will not be surprised."

Mirabeau has been reproached for his taste for scandalous love affairs. But in the case of a sensual and depraved monarch like Frederick William II, these matters have their importance, and if history may not be silent about the part played by Fräulein von Voss at the Court of Berlin, why should the reader be surprised, still more why should he be shocked, if a secret agent should observe, measure, and record the temperature of the royal passions? Mirabeau, however, yielded to his natural penchant for such things. He emphasizes them, and insists on them excessively. Tact was not his most conspicuous quality, and he is wanting in regard both for himself and for others. He forgot himself so far as to send a long letter full of good advice to Frederick William II, on the very day of his accession. The scheme of reform which he proposed contains excellent suggestions about military organisation, gratuitous justice, education, the freedom of the press, taxation, commerce and public works; but it was not for a foreigner to make them. It is not surprising that M. d'Esterno, at the express request of Prince Henry himself, should have complained to the French Government of the "presumption" which had led Mirabeau to use expressions "entirely unbecoming and very offensive."

The further question remains whether the letter was really his own work. It has been said that he borrowed its essential points from a memoir by the minister Hertzberg, and he was such an incorrigible plagiary, that there is nothing improbable in the suggestion.

His *Essay on Moses Mendelssohn and the political reform of the Jews,* appeared about the same time, and in its broad-mindedness is worthy of his avowed object,

which was to "encourage the reason and stimulate the pride" of a great prince. But how can one determine Mirabeau's share in a monograph in which he had for acknowledged collaborators "the good and estimable Dohm," Major Mauvillon and two Englishmen, whose work it was "almost enough merely to translate."

The real glory of his sojourn at Berlin consists in another action. He may justly be credited with the return to France of the illustrious geometer Lagrange. He took the initiative in a dispatch in which he dwelt upon the modesty and the merit of the great savant, in a passage of real eloquence. Lagrange's return anticipated his own by very little. He was weary of the business of a "subaltern diplomatist," which brought him neither gain nor glory, neither immediate profit nor the prospect of a career. He was weary of serving a Government which did not seem to recognize his zeal or appreciate his qualities, and after frequent solicitations, which had no result, he called upon Talleyrand on November 7, to tell him definitely what they meant to do for him. "By birth, in short," he observes, "I am superior to most ministers. My capacity I leave you to estimate; I should hesitate to do so myself. I do not think it should be difficult to find a place for me, and it is, therefore, for them to say the word. My own mind is finally made up." "The word" of a minister is not said in a moment. In the name of the Government Talleyrand assured Mirabeau that, "his correspondence was giving complete satisfaction, and that the King was reading it with much interest." But praises were no longer enough for Mirabeau. He considered that the time was come to pay him in some more material form of coin. When Talleyrand told him of Calonne's decision to convoke the Assembly of Notables, he decided that he had at last an opportunity of reconciling his interests with those of the nation: "My heart has not grown old, and if my enthusiasm is benumbed it is not dead. I felt that very

keenly to-day, and I look on the day on which you told me of the Convocation of Notables as one of the happiest in my life. No doubt it will soon be followed by a National Assembly, in which I see a new order of things which may regenerate the monarchy." He will not "disdain any kind of useful occupation." He would be secretary to the Notables, or would undertake a secret mission to Holland; he would do anything, in fact, provided that they would employ him; the question was, whether they would give him the chance.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE APPROACH OF THE REVOLUTION

Attacks on Calonne and Necker—The *Monarchie Prussienne*—Collaboration of Mauvillon—The Convocation of the Notables—Mirabeau demands States-General—Reconciliation with his father—A scandalous publication.

MIRABEAU returned to France in the last days of January 1787, and was not long in perceiving that the Government was not disposed to utilize his capacities either at home or abroad. The most Calonne would do was to make use of him as a "satellite and a maker of manifestoes," who would blindly support his policy and sing his praises. This was a mistake, which he aggravated by adding that "he would arrange everything financially." Mirabeau accepted the challenge. The *Dénonciation de l'Agiotage*, which appeared on March 6, was his reply. Its effect was tremendous. Mirabeau was congratulated by the Notables and by the citizens of all classes, and observed that his book would in all probability shake the earth even to the steps of the sanctuary. If he did not altogether escape the reproach that he was wreaking a personal vengeance, he had at least the right to say that he was fundamentally self-consistent. Writing in May 1783, he had already condemned in his pamphlet, *La Caisse d'Escompte*, the Government interventions in stock exchange speculations, of which he now accused the Controller-General in terms of such vehement indignation. As to speculation, had he not denounced it, to go no further back, in the memorandum which he handed to Calonne in June 1786, as "ruining Paris and sucking the blood of the kingdom,"

showing at the same time that "our public funds are in the gutter." Moreover, in denouncing with special insistence the speculations in the shares of the India Company, Mirabeau had a right to recall the fact that in their previous conversations the Minister had been completely silent on the subject.

Mirabeau was therefore justified, by reference to his previous polemics, in affirming the continuity of his views and in evading the reproach that he was merely writing a pamphlet inspired by the circumstances of the moment. Further, what he repeated he said in a new way. In the whole series of his financial writings he had never been more vigorous or more spontaneous. This time he determined to be himself, his whole self, and nothing but himself, and he gave of his best. Behind the author the orator appeared. The *Dénonciation de l'Agiotage* is composed like a speech, of which it has the form, the development, the movement, the brilliancy and the vitality. From the exordium addressed to the King to the peroration in which he appeals to the Notables, the book has the rhythm of a harangue. If we read it almost at hazard, the pages teem with oratorical passages; nothing is wanting but the voice and gesture of the platform. Mirabeau stigmatizes speculation as the most culpable of trades. "What I ask, what compensation can it offer," he cries, "when its one result, its only product, is a mad gamble in which millions do nothing but pass from one purse to another, creating nothing but a crowd of shadows paraded by the folly of one day, and extinguished by the folly of the next?" This phrase, with its opening interjection and its balanced rhythm, is made to be spoken, and there are others innumerable which produce the same impression.

If the *Dénonciation de l'Agiotage* revealed Mirabeau's command of oratory, it also gave him an opportunity of rising from polemics to politics. He places his confidence in a revolution as necessary as it was imminent. "So

long," he said, "as the kingdom is not reorganized under a regular constitution we shall be no more than a society consisting of different orders without unity, a people almost without any social system. Such a government may perhaps suit an army, but not a numerous people living on the land which belongs to them." He demands the organization of provincial administrations, of public education, and has, in fact, a complete programme.

Calonne was not named, but he had recognized himself in the following passage:—"Tell him that in carrying on a government to be skilful is to be honest; good speeches will not atone for bad actions. Suppleness of wit, facility, a graceful style, eloquent preambles and fine orations are so many damning proofs against a Minister who excels in the exposition of sound principles, which he eludes or insults when it comes to putting them in practice." To what other Ministers could this apply? At the same time that sentences of exile were being passed upon the speculators denounced by Mirabeau, the Baron de Breteuil was preparing a *lettre de cachet* to launch against him. He was warned in time by the Abbé de Périgord, and by Calonne himself, who asserted that he had nothing to do with the proposed measure, and crossing the frontier he betook himself to Tongres near Liége. He was famous but penniless. "The Commonweal is an ungrateful mistress," he wrote to Mme. de Nehra, "and celebrity is a strange thing: on the one hand fame such that there is not a salon or a boudoir or a street-corner that does not ring with the name of Mirabeau; on the other, hunger or something very like it."

His exile was short. When he returned to Paris Calonne had ceased to be Minister, and Necker was on the point of succeeding him. Mirabeau hated him. In the *Dénonciation de l'Agiotage* he had sharply attacked the "chimerical plan of providing for the cost of a war by continual loans without taxation, thus taking all the credit

and leaving to one's successors the really difficult work." This was the thesis to which he returned in two letters in which he examined with a passionate severity the acts of Necker's administration. He blamed him for the fall of Turgot, for the dearness of his own loans, for the introduction of the Genevese into French finance, and the admission of bankers into the administration of the Caisse d'Escompte, and he did not conceal his intention of preventing this "ambitious foreigner" from again governing France. There was, no doubt, some truth in certain of the reproaches heaped on Necker by Mirabeau, but his attack was couched in an excessively personal tone, it ignored the services he had rendered, and denied his incontestable merit. It is difficult to attribute the bitterness, the violence and the injustice of this polemic to a mere difference of opinion on economical and financial questions. Mirabeau had no doubt espoused the cause of Panchaud and the Genevese refugees, who were very bitter against Necker, but he was also influenced by personal antagonism. The ostentatious virtue paraded by the banker of Geneva on all occasions, and his haughty austerity were highly displeasing to Mirabeau, whose temperament was so profoundly different, and to a doctrinal antagonism was added an antipathy of personalities which was even less easy to reconcile.

Mirabeau was preparing a great work on Prussia, and in May 1787, he decided to go to Brunswick, where a distinguished collaborator had amassed for him the necessary materials and notes. His departure was preceded by a bad action, for he published as part of the posthumous works of Turgot, Dupont's memoir on provincial Assemblies, which he had already sold to Calonne as his own, together with two less important pieces. Was this lamentable abuse of confidence to be attributed to his financial embarrassments? This is the probable explanation, as two months earlier Mirabeau was "much disappointed

about money matters." Embarrassment was unhappily the melancholy accompaniment of his whole life, and it explains if it does not excuse the deplorable acts of baseness of which he was guilty.

His letters to Mme. de Nehra record the stages of his journey, and throw light upon his plans. Their gay simplicity and their tender delicacy reveal the best side of a nature in which there are so many disconcerting contrasts. He still loved Yet-Lie with a love in which there was a tinge of respect, and she exercised the happiest influence on his life, hitherto without guidance or order. "My poor Mirabeau," she said to him one day, "you have only one friend in the world, and that is myself." Mirabeau determined never to forget this, and as long as he kept this resolution he confided in Mme. de Nehra and took her advice about his affairs, which did not suffer thereby. His great idea at this time was to set up a printing press at Kiel with two partners. His book on Prussia and his collected writings were to be the first venture of the firm. "If in five years' time," he wrote, "we have not one of the finest book-selling and printing businesses in Europe I am no better than a fool." This project came to nothing.

From abroad he followed the course of affairs in France. He was disquieted by Calonne's departure for England. "I do not understand this fury," he wrote, "or how Ministers can set such a dangerous precedent of bitter persecution of a colleague, for in such a matter precedents are all that is wanted. The prosecution of a Minister of Finance might perhaps have been really salutary in the public interest; but if so, it should have been carried out frankly, directly, vigorously, but above all impartially, and should not have been preceded by humiliation and a cloud of low intrigues." For his part he acquainted the Abbé de Périgord, for the information of M. de Brienne and M. de Montmorin, with the movements of the Prussian

troops. Though often retarded by "the distractions of the Court," he worked furiously at his book, which was finished at the end of August. He was very proud of his new work, and wrote to Mme. de Nehra, "My dear friend, when this work appears I shall be little more than thirty-eight, and I venture to predict that it will make my name, and that my country may perhaps regret that such an observer was left without employment, and such work without a fit reward."

The volume *De la Monarchie prussienne* did not appear until a year later. Mirabeau had dedicated it to his father, "to compensate a little by this honourable employment of his maturer years for the troubles which he had caused him by his stormy youth." The old economist was flattered by such homage from a man whom he regarded as "the rarest of his age," but his formidable critical sense pronounced the book to be "the enormous compilation of a frenzied workman." This is precisely the verdict which will now be passed upon it. Its four volumes represent a great deal of work, but Mirabeau was not the chief labourer. Major Mauvillon, an officer of Engineers, a teacher at Brunswick, himself the author of numerous works, procured him all the materials. Mirabeau wrote to him: "Hasten more than ever the completion of your great work, which will secure either our fame or our fortune, for if I print it, it shall be under our two names." The execution of the promise, which Mirabeau did not keep, would have been nothing more than an act of justice; but it must be added that without Mirabeau's initiative, his incessant energy and his sustained stimulation Mauvillon could never have imagined or succeeded in carrying out so considerable an enterprise. Mirabeau's letter to him must be read in order to understand how irresistible were the solicitations which they contained. Mirabeau spared neither flatteries nor caresses nor tender persuasions, and his correspondent saw in him (as was

really the case) "the most attractive of men, who of all people can make one think, believe, say and do exactly what he wishes." He sent plans, books, documents, maps, statistics; he suggested ideas and sketched developments, and he never spared expense.

Thus counselled, directed, encouraged, charmed and remunerated, the learned Prussian officer gave up all his time and labour to the overwhelming task. It was not merely materials of all kinds, historical, geographical, economic, financial, military and statistical, that he furnished. There is a letter from Mirabeau which casts doubts even on the parts of the book which are attributed to him without question. "You quite understand, my friend, that the estimate of Frederick II must be just and severe. No one doubts that he was a great man. But what was he as a King and a shepherd of mankind? That is another matter." The portrait of Frederick II is famous; it dominates the book and has survived it. Was it, then, not written by Mirabeau after all? The truth seems to be that the groundwork of the picture was painted by Mauvillon, but that Mirabeau rehandled it with the opulence of his own palette, gave it colour, animation—life. Moreover, in recounting the effect produced by the death of this great King he quotes from himself, borrowing textually several phrases from the letter which he wrote to Talleyrand during his mission. "All was gloom, but no one was sad; all was business, but no one was afflicted. There was not a single regret, not a single sigh, not one panegyric! Such was to be the end of so many victories, so much glory, a reign of nearly half a century filled with a multitude of prodigies!" And he adds, "They were weary of him even to hatred."

This conciseness, which reminds one of Tacitus or Saint-Simon, is quite admirable and is characteristic of Mirabeau at his best. I agree also that "part of the introduction, the general arrangement, and the philosophical

and political generalizations," and the conclusion are to be attributed to him either because they are in harmony with his views, or because of their oratorical form. It will always, however, be impossible to get any exact or just idea of the respective contributions of Major Mauvillon and Mirabeau. This matters little: the "enormous compilation" had an incontestable value in its day, but it is now neither interesting nor profitable to the reader. The title alone remains, and that because it has a share in the name and fame of Mirabeau.

After a perilous crossing from Berlin to Hamburg, Mirabeau reached Paris towards the end of September 1787. The situation was grave. Calonne, ill qualified to resume the reforms of Turgot and to put an end to the abuses which more than any one he had helped to develop, had succumbed under the weight of his contradictions and his errors. The *Dénonciation de l'Agiotage* had had something to do with his dismissal. His successor, Loménie de Brienne, Archbishop of Toulouse, had been struggling for the previous five months with difficulties which he had not had the courage to face. The opponent of Calonne before the Assembly of Notables, he had at first given great hopes to the supporters of reform. In May 1787 Mirabeau welcomed him as "a man of great talent and consequence." At the beginning of October La Fayette still trusted him in spite of the mistakes he had made. The indecision of his character, the uncertainty of his views, his alternations of slackness and violence had, however, proved his irremediable weakness and impotence. His maladroitness, aggravated by infatuation, had restored the credit of the Parlement of Paris in public opinion to an unforeseen extent, and that body cleverly and boldly used this accession of popularity to reject unpopular taxation and to demand States-General, for which there was now a universal clamour covering very different projects.

The Parlement having been dismissed to Troyes and then recalled, was asked to register a loan of four hundred and twenty millions, spread over a period of five years, subject to a promise that the States-General which had been demanded would at the same time be convoked. Mirabeau quite saw the necessity for a loan, without which, as he wrote to Soufflot de Mérey, M. de Brienne's head clerk, "You can neither go on or, indeed, see the year out." When he wrote this letter, shortly after his return from Germany, and no doubt at the beginning of October, he was in the same state of mind which made him beg the Abbé de Périgord in the preceding year to give him employment for his activities. He now addressed himself to M. de Montmorin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, "offering himself purely and simply," but expressing a preference for the "executive life," to which, he said, not without reason, he was more suited than to a speculative existence. Warsaw, St. Petersburg, Constantinople, Alexandria, any of these would suit him, provided that he could enter a career to which he thought that his name, his travel, "his knowledge and his facility of work" gave him some right to aspire.

The reception accorded to him by M. de Montmorin had led him to hope that this benefactor would "restore him to the life that was natural to him and set him in his true light." How was this to be done? It was for the Minister to determine both the nature of the employment and the remuneration. "I need nothing but what I shall earn. You alone, therefore, know what I should be paid, for you alone know how you can make use of me if I have the happiness to be employed." He explained that the bad health of "his most interesting companion," a secretary and "an indispensable establishment" cost him a lot of money. In these circumstances he left it to the Count to decide, but he wrapped up his desires in the most skilful precautions. "A fixed allowance on which I could

count, and which I should never exceed by a sou, would reduce my expenses all the more easily as I am, if not economical, at least moderate."

With Loménie de Brienne he was more reserved. He did not conceal how much he had been "attracted and charmed by the circumstances which promised an era of hope for his country." But he would not "ask for the confidence of a man to whom he had not yet given his own," or offer his services to one "whose plans were not known to or approved by him." The conduct of the department of the Controller-General of the Finances was not reassuring. He did not approve of the technical conditions under which some "old professors" were preparing the loan, whose political conditions he criticized a few weeks later. The autograph drafts still survive, dated November 10 and 18 respectively, of two letters containing directions and advice which he addressed to a magistrate of the Parlement. The crisis was becoming acute. What was the Parlement about to do? Would it accept an immediate final comprehensive loan with the promise that the States-General would meet before 1792, or by refusing registration would it commence a struggle with the Minister and resume the hostilities interrupted by the recall from Troyes? Mirabeau held to his demand that the States-General should meet, not in 1792, but in 1789, and it was of this that he was endeavouring to persuade his correspondent.

These letters are the true beginning of his political career and of his participation in public affairs, which, however, was still indirect. Luminous, pressing, decisive, they display a maturity of mind, a firmness of reasoning and an insight which are really remarkable. In them Mirabeau's genius, compact of passion and of reflection, of vehemence and policy, of boldness and moderation, is manifest and commanding. He does not suffer from the "terrible malady" with which he was later to reproach

Ministers, "of never being able to make up his mind to do to-day what he will infallibly be compelled to do to-morrow." He knows what he wants and he will have it. Why adjourn the convocation of the States-General to a date at once distant and uncertain which inspired no confidence in good citizens? "If the force of circumstances make 1789 inevitable, why not ask for 1789? The state of the nation is too critical to allow those who are responsible for it another sixty months of expedients, or to permit them to borrow five or six hundred millions to cover a useless interval. For this mobile country a lustre is equivalent to a whole age. . . . The century is too far advanced, the ferment in men's minds is too great to allow us to lose anything of what we have acquired."

On the eve of the return of the Parlement to Paris he returns to the charge. He has been reproached with contradicting himself in the course of a month by urging his friend the magistrate to oppose a loan, the necessity of which he had admitted in his letter to Soufflot de Mérey. The reproach is unjust. He combated not the loan, but the absence of guarantees in the scheme proposed by the Archbishop of Toulouse. According to him it would be to dishonour oneself gratuitously, and to do a thing impossible for an honest man, to register a loan of five hundred million "merely in return for a vague promise made in a disingenuous form of words, that States-General would be convoked before five years were over." That would be to give everything and to risk getting nothing in return. He advised his friend to agree to a loan of a hundred and twenty millions only, and that in return for a promise that the States-General would meet in 1789. Any other attitude would be a betrayal. To take the part of the minority against the country promised more risk than advantage. "The time is past," he concluded, "when any individual had the power to compensate a man for loss of public esteem, and the time is coming when the

suffrage of the nation will be enough to make any able man a citizen of great consequence."

On November 19, after the debate in the Parlement and before the voting took place, Lamoignon, the Keeper of the Seals, turned to the King, took his commands and declared that the edicts were registered. This was a *coup d'état* and an arbitrary action. Mirabeau was indignant. To the Duc d'Orléans, who protested against the illegality of the measure, he sent an expression of congratulation and admiration. But a protest which was to be followed by exile did not solve the difficulties of a situation which was big with consequences. It was necessary to act. But how, with whom, by what means? Mirabeau was no more than an ordinary citizen. He had neither rank nor place, but the times had moved, and to prevent the crime which was in preparation, to spare his country the humiliation of a dishonourable bankruptcy, he found in his right as a citizen a sufficient authority. He did not wish to remain silent amid the desolation of France. There was in the Ministry "an honest man," M. de Montmorin, on whose influence with the King he counted. He addressed himself to him, and I do not know that he ever surpassed the heights to which his patriotism raised him at that time.

His letter to the Minister, dated November 20, was written at a sitting almost without a correction. It welled forth, spontaneous, vigorous and moving, from the depths of his mind and heart. Is it a letter, or is it a speech? Like all his happiest inspirations it is oratorical in form, it is composed rather to be spoken than read, and few phrases would require to be altered in order to transform it into a harangue hurled from the tribune to excite not the conscience of a timid Minister, but the unchained passions of a great assembly. It is not overloaded with useless detail. It is a reply, and without exordium or preamble it goes straight to the point. "The loan is

rejected: it could not be otherwise." What is to be done? Are payments to be suspended, or is the debt to be cut down? Are we to forget "that the bare word of a king should be worth more than the oath of another man"? Against this baseness, this policy worthy of Caligula, which will end in ruin and "reduce 200,000 citizens to the execrable alternative of days of hunger or living on the proceeds of crime," the orator heaps up reasons, shows the moral and material impossibility of the measure, and how "the remorse of having initiated it will be followed by the shame of being compelled to abandon it." What then is to be done? "They must proclaim in precise and solemn terms the assembly in 1789 of States-General which are now inevitable." To postpone them is to leave everything in stagnation or anarchy, to provoke violent seditions. To prepare and announce them willingly is to give the King "the best year of his life." His Majesty's advisers had only two courses to put before him—"a crime which was infinitely dangerous, and an act of benevolence which was indispensably necessary. Could they hesitate between the two? Could they compare the advantages of the alternative plans?" To this vehement adjuration Mirabeau added a terrible prophecy. "I ask if you have reckoned with the convulsive energy of hunger on the genius of despair. I ask who will dare to make himself responsible for the consequences for the safety of all who surround the throne, nay, of the King himself? . . ." He implores the Minister to make up his mind in conscience and wisdom to speak out, and if he is not understood to resign, in order to spare himself the reproach of "having assisted at the debate which decreed the shame of France. There are moments when courage is prudence, when temporizing is a crime and silence a dishonour!"

The convocation of States-General seemed to Mirabeau to be the only way of pacifying the anger and disappointment which were abroad. The mere words *States-General*

*in 1789* must necessarily, according to him, bring back confidence and credit to a country of whose immense resources and profound vitality he was well aware. In the month of April, replying to an appeal from Dutch patriots, he had already proclaimed that "the first moments of the convalescence of France will be as good as the health of her neighbours." At the same time, about three days later, having written to M. de Montmorin, he dissipated the preconceived ideas of his friend Mauvillon. "France," he said, "has never been intrinsically stronger and healthier, never nearer to developing her full stature. There is nothing wrong here but the temporary embarrassment of an unsystematic administration, and the absurd fear of appealing to the nation for national reconstruction."

The Ministers were, in fact, obsessed by this fear, and M. de Montmorin remained deaf to Mirabeau's appeals. Seven months were still to elapse, full of abortive efforts, violence and disturbances, before Loménie de Brienne could make up his mind, under the pressure of events in Brittany and Dauphiné and under the menaces of the Grand Council itself, to convoke the States-General on August 12, 1788, for 1789.

Under the title *Analyse des papiers anglais,* Mirabeau, with Clavière and Brissot, had founded in 1787 a journal chiefly devoted to foreign politics, but dealing also to some extent with constitutional problems and domestic events. This publication gave him an opportunity of affirming his independence of the Government with a pride the accents of which one regrets not to be able to admire more frequently. M. de Montmorin had disapproved of a polemic in which the *Analyse* was engaged with Mallet du Pan, who edited the *Mercure de France.* "Allow me, M. le Comte, in pursuance of my engagement not to give the slightest umbrage to Government, to support its views when they are in conformity with my principles, and to abstain from comment when I cannot approve of

its proceedings. I persevere in my own way and my own plan, and pay no more heed to the clamours of Mallet and Panckoucke than to the buzzing of the insects that fly around me."

Mirabeau continued to preach the convocation, "ever more necessary, more pressing and more infallible," of States-General, to which it is remarkable that, as early as April 1788, he gave the name of National Assembly.

It was at this time that Lamoignon and M. de Montmorin asked him to publish a pamphlet against the Parlements, whose hostility was becoming more and more formidable. He at first refused to perform the task. The letter he wrote to M. de Montmorin on April 18, to explain the reasons for his refusal, does as much honour to his courage as to his insight. His attitude is concentrated in a phrase, "I shall never make war on the Parlements except in the presence of the nation. When the nation, united and constituted, has given itself a constitution it will be time to recall the Parlements to their judicial functions, to deprive them of the privileges they have usurped, to put an end to their intrigues and their foolish provocations. In the meantime we must maintain the only bodies which have preserved the means of compounding with the terrible will of a single man." Precipitation would necessarily be suspicious. "If you take from the nation the phantom which it has long regarded as the protector of its rights without calling upon it to protect and exercise them itself, men will not believe that you are repressing the ambition of the Parlements in order to give the kingdom a constitution. They will think they are on the way to absolute despotism, to entirely arbitrary government." Let the Government convoke States-General and thereby calm the impatience of good citizens and recover their confidence. It will then avoid the "menace of an insurrection, the consequences of which it is not given to human wisdom to measure," and it will deprive all turbulent men and

organizations of all pretext for raising a storm before the meeting of the National Assembly. No, "the moment for waging a wordy war against the Parlements is not yet come." Mirabeau refuses on the ground that he did not wish to throw himself into a doubtful cause, the object of which is uncertain, the principle doubtful, and the progress dark and terrifying." It would be impossible to find a stronger combination of personal dignity and political common sense.

Three weeks later appeared the *Réponse aux alarmes des bon citoyens,* an anonymous pamphlet which was a formal denunciation of the Parlements, attacking their encroachments, their abuses and their privileges, the scandal of their legislative pretensions, their venality and their hereditary offices. The author of this pamphlet was Mirabeau! One would be glad to doubt it, but he has himself admitted that if he did not write it all, his pen "traced all that was theoretical and effective in it." What is the secret of such a remarkably rapid evolution? Must we again entertain the terrible suspicion of bribery and corruption which stains so many of the actions and the writings of Mirabeau? I cannot deny the contradiction which remains painful and disconcerting, but I think it right to reduce it to its exact proportions.

Mirabeau was at bottom anything but favourable to the *bonnets carrés,* whose opposition to Turgot's reforms he had not forgotten. He had endured but had not approved "the inconceivable situation which had made France parliamentary." He did not love the Parlements, and he did not defend them for their own sake, but only as against the despotism in which an unprecedented concourse of circumstances had made them its adversaries in the eyes of the nation. They were in his view the transition, unexpected, doubtless, but inevitable, to the States-General which he demanded. His book points to these very States-General as "necessarily and prescriptively the

supreme legislator which should periodically possess all sovereign rights." In order to "make the state of the nation tolerable and to prepare it at no distant date for a splendid future, he expected the States-General to discuss taxation, economy, the abolition of privileges, the suppression of *lettres de cachet,* the freedom of the press. In this programme he was consistent with himself. But even though he escapes the reproach of repudiating his own views, he had none the less made a mistake in publishing a book which his friend the Duc de Lauzun blamed for having destroyed for the benefit of people who did not wish to rebuild. This reproach was difficult to refute.

By a fatality which Mirabeau could not foresee, the pamphlet appeared immediately after the execution of the violent measures against the Parlement: the arrest of D'Épremesnil, the constitution of the *Cour plenière.* If it had not prepared this violence it appeared to justify it, though Mirabeau regarded the surrounding of the Palace as a proceeding both stupid and odious. Events bore out the wise warnings contained in the letter to M. de Montmorin, and Mirabeau himself returned to the actual terms of the letter, three months afterwards, in a continuation of the *Dénonciation de l'Agiotage,* reproducing textually the most important passages. He admitted that the Minister who had destroyed the Parlements without giving the nation the guarantee of a constitution had made a mistake. He demanded a constitution once more as "the basis of all economy, of all resources, of all confidence, of all power." When the Minister at last decided, on August 8, to convoke the States-General, Mirabeau exclaimed that the nation had stepped forward a century in twenty-four hours. He was patriotic enough to rejoice for the sake of the interests of the country, for which he saw the promise of a new destiny. But it cannot be doubted that he also felt a profound personal satisfaction. When, in November 1787, he wrote to M. de Montmorin, "The day will come when

the suffrage of the nation will be enough to make a good citizen a man of great consideration," one may wonder whether he was referring to the Minister or to himself. Now there is no longer any room for doubt. He unburdens himself to Mauvillon of his joyous confidence. "Ah, my friend, you will see what sort of a nation this will be when it has its constitution, when talent also will be a power in the land. I hope that when the time comes you will hear good news of your friend."

The hour was, in fact, at hand when he was about to enter on the active and glorious phase of his career. Unhappily the admirable woman who, with disinterested love, had for the past four years shared his troubles and his labours, who had encouraged, sustained and restored him to himself, was almost at the very same moment driven out of his life by his own evil conduct. In July 1787, writing from Brunswick, he said, "Ah, Henriette, if ever an evil genius came between us, if it were possible that you should ever leave me to my fate, I might seek distraction in the whirlwind of pleasure, but I should not find happiness there, and it would soon be the death of me. . . ." The "evil genius" soon came on the scene. The projected publication of the *Monarchie prussienne* had brought Mirabeau into touch with the bookseller Lejay. Mme. Lejay, a pretty, vicious and intriguing woman, was not long in acquiring an ascendency over him which, as Dumont tells us in his *Souvenirs*, "she used only to excite his natural violence and to serve her own interests. His friends blushed to see him the slave of a woman whose disorderly life was not redeemed by a single good quality." Mme. Lejay was passionate, perfidious and cruel; she was jealous of Mme. de Nehra, and wished to be the sole possessor of Mirabeau's affections. She therefore did her best to irritate and excite her lover against her rival, and she succeeded only too well. Mirabeau, being entirely in the wrong, had constant scenes

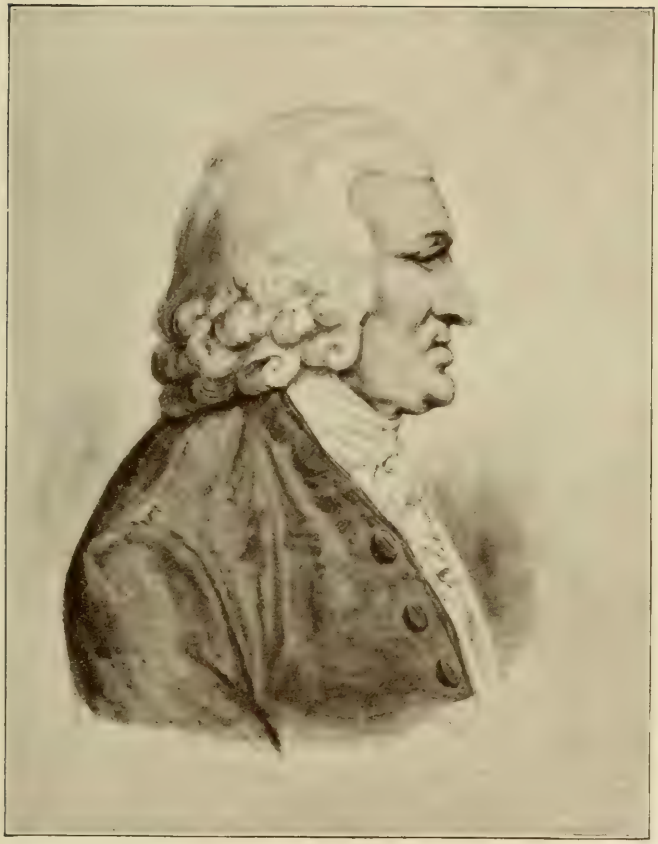
with Mme. de Nehra, passing from violence to repentance, from fury to tears, from reproaches to excuses. He cursed the new woman who was troubling his existence, but the terrible "physical frenzy," the family affliction which his father had so often noted in him, always unfailingly brought him back to her. Feeling that their common life was becoming intolerable, Mme. de Nehra sacrificed herself and left him. Mirabeau judged her truly when he wrote, "You have a just and wise intelligence, the address of a woman and the sense of a man." When he lost her he lost more than a friend. When his good genius left him there departed also a part of his conscience, and it was not long before the evil genius who entirely took her place inspired him to commit one of the worst actions in his tempestuous life.

While this calamity (no other word would be appropriate) was overtaking his private life, he was being more and more drawn to public affairs. Proposals that he should become a candidate for the States-General had been made to him from Alsace. This may have been the occasion of a letter which he wrote on August 16, 1788, to Levrault, the Strasbourg bookseller. None of his writings better indicates both his feeling about the political situation, his personal opinions and the incomparable clairvoyance of his genius. He was well aware that the first States-General "would do many foolish things," but his confidence in a legal constitution remained unimpaired. His view was that it would be a mistake to attempt too much. His immediate programme was summed up under three main heads—taxation by consent of the nation, civil liberty, and periodical assemblies. His motto was, "No quarter to privileges and the privileged." He repudiated any violent revolution, and built hopes on education and on a free press, which events after his death cruelly disappointed. He advocated a numerous assembly, but thought that five or six men of ability would be enough to "con-

trol the crowd." He may have foreseen his own destiny and the judgment of history when he added, "Without corruption (for those who can be corrupted are never worth corrupting) the Government should make sure of these five or six men." There can be no doubt that he reckoned himself as one of them.

But who would open the doors of the States-General to him? Alsace "jilted" him, as he put it, and he turned his thoughts to Provence, where his lawsuit had earned for him a popular triumph not yet forgotten. Here, however, he required the support and countenance of his father. What would the Marquis say and do? For five years all relations had been at an end between them, but the old man had been following the career of his son, whose talent he recognized, however much he deplored his lack of character, judgment and honesty. During the last few months, however, his views had been less severe. He realized that events suited to his capacity were about to give him a chance; but what part was he to play? "If this gentleman," he wrote, "wished to make a figure in the nation he would do well to return to his native province. There, where he is well known, his labours and his talent would give him weight as a member of the Assembly. His father, whose one desire is peace and quietness, has nothing to do with all this." The old Marquis was quite right in the main, but he was mistaken about his own influence on this decisive phase in his son's career. He knew that Mirabeau was a friend of the Ministers and was in close touch with M. de Lamoignon and M. de Montmorin. He had been vaguely sounded on the subject of his relations with Mirabeau, but had given evasive answers. In the name of M. de Montmorin, the Bishop of Blois, M. de Thèmines, in due course made more definite overtures, and in order to secure his father's goodwill even more completely, Mirabeau appealed to the Bailli. He had behaved badly to his uncle after the Aix case, in

which he had been so much helped by his kindness; but the Bailli, with his usual goodness of heart, had forgiven him. At the instance of the Bishop the Marquis was already disposed to receive his son, but only "in order that he might say that he had done so," and not to injure his chances. The Marquis still refused to be told anything about his son's plans and intentions. This was not much, but it was enough; and Mirabeau soon enlarged the narrow opening before him. The dedication of the *Monarchie prussienne,* with its respectful admiration, appealed to the Marquis as a kind of *amende honorable,* and though he realized the defects of the huge book, he was astonished by the great amount of labour and talent which it contained. A long letter, dated October 4, completed the conquest. In it Mirabeau replied, point by point, to all his father's reproaches, and defended himself above all against the charge that his pen was venal. "When have I argued on both sides of a case? That is the essential characteristic of a hireling pen." He explained his relations with Calonne, the conditions of his mission to Berlin, and the disinterested relations he had had with M. de Lamoignon. These explanations were adroit, and to all appearance precise enough to produce a good impression on the Marquis. But how much more must he have been touched by the deference with which his son offered to retire in his favour if his health permitted him to appear at the States-General? "You will make a great sensation there," insinuates Mirabeau, "and your day of glory will be a day of pride for our family." It is only if his father cannot come forward, and in order that "estates so considerable as ours should have their representative," that he solicits the honour of election. This letter had its effect. The Marquis had retired to Argenteuil, and was resting at a house to which he at first refused access to his son, but he ended by summoning him thither. The interview was ceremonious. The author of the *Ami des Hommes* lectured the author of the *Mon-*



THE MARQUIS DE MIRABEAU

(*From a drawing in the Paul Arbaud collection at Aix*)

*archie prussienne* on the philosophical and anti-religious affectations of his book. Mirabeau was deferential and conciliatory. "You know well," wrote the Marquis to the Bailli, "how good he is at agreeing with everything one wants." On that day he agreed to everything with even more docility than usual. He gained his point, and did not think that his success was too dearly purchased at the price of having to endure respectfully an economic sermon.

M. de Montmorin, in taking action with the Marquis to facilitate a reconciliation, had done Mirabeau a great service. It was enough to make him hope and ask for more. It was thought probable that the rules of the election would require that candidates should produce proof of territorial status, and as he could not be sure that his negotiations in Provence would succeed, Mirabeau had acquired a small estate in Dauphiné. The transaction was a fictitious one, but it had cost a considerable sum, and on November 10, in addition to the balance of the price, he had to pay the expenses, which amounted to 4800 francs. Mirabeau, encouraged by the kindness of the Duc de Lauzun, begged him to do his best with the Minister for Foreign Affairs. "M. de Montmorin," he wrote, "has often told me to regard him as my banker, and since the small sum which you were good enough to extort from him for me I have not had a sou of his money, or any other money of any kind from the Government; you will believe my word of honour rather than treacherous and absurd gossip. . . . It would be a great thing for me if he could arrange to have this sum lent to me, and in truth I think he might make a worse use of the King's money." On the 14th he emphasized the extreme urgency of the matter, and pointed out that it was his only chance of becoming a member of the States-General. But, this time at least, though he promised to be grateful, he reserved with proper dignity his political liberty of action. "I beg you," he wrote, "to make any engagements on my

behalf with M. de Montmorin which you would yourself undertake in my position, and no others. I can promise to spare individuals, but I cannot promise to respect or conciliate any principles than my own." Two days later Mirabeau reported a conversation he had had with M. de Montmorin. The Minister, who seemed to have a "real desire to see him in the States-General," and who had decided "to take steps to get him some pecuniary assistance in order to help him to enter the National Assembly," gave him an appointment for a date subsequent to the fatal settling day. Of this settling day Mirabeau, "with a delicacy which may or may not have been misplaced," had been unwilling to speak, and he again begged the Duc de Lauzun to do what he could for him. "Do me this service, M. le Duc," he wrote. "If to the 4800 francs for the estate they could add 100 or 150 louis at least, whether for my travelling expenses to the province where my election will be carried on, or for the entertainment of the electors, they will complete the load of obligation under which they will place me. I have spoken of two or three thousand crowns. Go further if you think it possible, M. le Duc. I confess that 500 louis would give me great pleasure, but it is absolutely necessary that I should have 4800 francs for the 20th." What was the result of this "trepan" (the word is Mirabeau's own) is not clear. It does not seem that the Minister granted his request, as on December 17 Mirabeau wrote, "If he really makes an effort this time, let it be decisive and not abortive," and on the 23rd he was again urging M. de Lauzun to further zealous and friendly activities. "If M. de Montmorin knew half the trouble to which he is condemning me he would arrange with his good friend Necker that some crumbs from the Treasury might fall at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. . . . What a fatality it is that we who are worth more than they should lack the one power which is really decisive at the present moment—the power of

money! Ah, Monsieur le Duc, let us at any cost be in the States-General; we shall lead them—and we shall do great things, and have great joys worth more than the playthings of a court!"

Alas, it was indeed "at any cost" that Mirabeau wished to be a member of the States-General. I have before me the originals of these letters, which show that he was bankrupt in another than the material sense. The writing is clear, composed and without erasure. Must we believe that his incessant need of money had obliterated in him the moral sense to such a degree that he did not feel that these obsequious appeals lowered his dignity and his proper pride? For his honour one would be glad not to know of these documents, but knowing them one cannot suppress them without treachery to the truth of history. They reveal once again, and not for the last time, the secret vice, the incurable taint, the deplorable want of conscience which characterized him. But is it Mirabeau alone who stands condemned? On January 16 Chateaubriand, on his way to Berlin as Louis XVIII's ambassador, was amusing himself on the journey by re-reading the *Correspondance secrète*, and from Mayence he wrote to Mme. de Duras, "I have been struck with one thing, and that is the frivolity and incapacity of a Government who had under their eyes the correspondence of such a man and could not guess what he was."

The publication of this *Correspondence*, which, according to Chateaubriand, ought to have opened up a diplomatic career for Mirabeau, was deplorable, and imperilled his chance of becoming a member of the States-General. Under the title of *Histoire secrète de la cour de Berlin*, Mirabeau's letters to the Abbé de Périgord in 1786 and 1787 appeared in two stout volumes in January 1789. The scandal was increased by the fact that Prince Henry, who was much mishandled in the book, was at the very moment of publication the guest of the French Government.

"It is perhaps," says the *Correspondence* of Grimm and Diderot, "the most inconceivable and audacious libel that any one has ever dared to publish. We mention it here only in order to hold it up to universal indignation." The Berlin Government were offended and complained, and the Minister, forced to act, reported the book to the Parlement, by which on February 10 it was ordered to be destroyed as "a defamatory and calumnious libel as contrary to the respect due to a friendly Power as to the law of nations and to public international law." The printing and sale of the book were forbidden, and the sentence ordered that an information should be laid against the author, publisher and printer. The printer was reprimanded, but the author was neither pursued nor disturbed. Public opinion and the circumstances pointed to Mirabeau. He was busy with his campaign in Provence; he was astonished by the hue and cry which he had not expected, and by the indignation aroused, the severity of which was in sharp contrast to the manners of the period, and was, in fact, surprising. He therefore jested and argued about the publication, and even denied it in a series of letters, public and private, which deceived no one. He was, in truth, allowing the storm to pass, persuaded that "it is rash to use, the words 'always' and 'never' with the public, and especially with the French public." After his triumphant return he thought himself invulnerable, and took a higher tone; but the gravity of the indiscretion and his audacious and lying denials of it had struck a serious blow at his credit.

It was bad enough to have published his *Lettres à Cerutti,* in which Mirabeau renewed and aggravated his violent attacks on Necker at the very time when he was soliciting pecuniary assistance from the Government of which Necker was the head. In that case he was making use of a private correspondence in which the answers to his letters, at least, were not his property. But the Berlin

correspondence had a totally different character, it was diplomatic in essence and in origin; it dealt with princes and ambassadors, and was the exclusive property of the Government to which it was addressed, and which had deciphered it and paid for it. Its publication exposed France to the risk of the gravest complications, and involved responsibilities the nature and extent of which Mirabeau knew better than any one. He has been accused of having been paid by M. de Montmorin under the double condition that he would not publish it and would not present himself at the States-General. His letter to the Duc de Lauzun and the letters of M. de Montmorin are sufficient to show that this is unfounded. The truth is that, having "bill transactions" with the Lejay household, he was in pressing need of money. When he begged the Duc de Lauzun to extort something from M. de Montmorin he said to him, "If you succeed, you will be so kind as to remit this sum to Messrs. Lejay, to whom I have given directions about it?" This is almost a confession. On the other hand, he required a large sum of money for election purposes, and the *Histoire secrète* furnished what he wanted. When Mme. de Nehra left him she observed, "You are in execrable hands," and this observation was prophetic.

# CHAPTER X

## THE ELECTIONS IN PROVENCE

Mirabeau, the *Noblesse* and the *Tiers État:* First manifestations of Mirabeau's oratorical powers—The disturbances at Marseilles and at Aix: Mirabeau as peacemaker—The election at Aix.

MIRABEAU, after a journey in the course of which he had been able to appreciate the extent of the distress caused by an exceptionally rigorous winter, arrived at Aix on January 15, 1789. The Municipal Council of Aix in the name of the ancient privilege of Provence had protested against the terms of the convocation of the States. It had been decided at a meeting called by the Council to petition his Majesty very humbly, "to summon forthwith a general assembly of the three orders of the country, both to determine the composition of the States of the province, the number of deputies of each order, and the rules thereunto relating, and to give these deputies the requisite instructions." The request for a general assembly of the three orders dominated all the rest. The Tiers État of Provence, which had declared in advance that it would consider null and void all deliberations not held in this form, was not associated with the petition.

Mirabeau, convoked by the syndics of the landed proprietors, sat in the States of the Nobility where he had already voted sixteen years before. Whether by policy or from pride in his rank as a gentleman unwilling to abdicate his rights and titles, it was to his own order that he first addressed himself, without, however, losing sight of the Tiers État, in which he felt that he would find his base of operations, his influence and his power. The place he

took in the procession preceding the opening of the States was significant. Portalis the younger records that he walked in a manner between the nobility and the Tiers État, and in the last rank of the nobility. The Tiers had received him with lively enthusiasm, but on the other hand he was made to feel that the Noblesse regarded him with concealed hatred and distrust. "I do not trouble myself about it," he wrote to his father, "but I let it be understood that if I am not noble, I have made up my mind to be bourgeois." On January 21, he combated energetically but unsuccessfully the protest against the rules of 1788, which was made by the nobility who were enraged by the doubling of the Tiers État. Incidentally he alluded to the vote by heads, the principle of which he admitted, demanding whether Provence could evade what was the common law of the realm.

On January 23, he spoke again. A rule of 1620 had been cited in order to insist that any one claiming to sit in the States of the Nobility must be the possessor of a fief. This meant the exclusion of Mirabeau, who at once began to prepare himself for the emergency. He was skilful enough not to seem to be on his guard, and took the line of pleading the general cause of those nobles whom such a decision would cast out of all the orders, and who could be neither electors nor capable of being elected, neither representatives nor represented. Those who violated the principles of justice by proposing to act in this way "would be acting against their own interests, for it was not for those who set themselves up to resist the millions belonging to the Tiers État to cut themselves off from their equals." He was defeated as he had been before, but he carried with him an important minority; and he was justified in considering his defeat to be "a signal victory in a servile assembly in which hitherto no speech had been heard beyond the words 'I agree with Messieurs les Syndics.'"

If he regarded the Noblesse "as an ignorant, rapacious and insolent body" he was under no illusion as to the energy to be expected of the Tiers État. Those who composed it were connected with the administration by personal ties which embarrassed and weakened their action. They were without "enlightenment and without a plan," and they made but a faint resistance to the intrigues and the suggestions of the privileged classes. Mirabeau summed up the situation in a profound and admirable saying, borrowed from Tacitus, which he was fond of quoting: "Voluntary servitude makes more tyrants than tyranny itself makes involuntary slaves."

In the circumstances he determined to bring things to a head by contesting the legality of the States of Provence as then constituted. He did so in a moderate and precise speech, the argument of which, while necessarily somewhat theoretical and abstract, was full of life and power. He could not admit that "the two orders who are not the nation should prevail over the nation," and he demanded a general convocation of the three orders as the Communes of Provence in 1788 and the Municipal Council of Aix had done.

In view of the disagreement which persisted in the States and the agitation of public opinion which the discussion was beginning to arouse, the King's commissaries suspended the deliberations. This suspension prevented Mirabeau from replying at a sitting of the States to the protest which, on January 31, the orders of the clergy and the nobility entered on the minutes against his speech. This protest accused him of having prevented conciliation and of having affirmed opinions "subversive of public order and contrary to the authority of the King." He was not a man to endure in silence such an unfair reproach. On February 3 he printed his reply. It is more than famous: it is immortal. He revealed his full stature and came forward as the equal of the greatest orators of

antiquity. He had produced the first of his masterpieces of political eloquence. There is nothing wanting in it and nothing excessive. With extraordinary adroitness he seized the opportunity so imprudently offered to him of identifying his personal grievances with the public interest. Against the insolence and awkwardness of the nobility, against the attitude of the clergy, always too skilful in protecting its privileges by appeals to the respect due to God and the King, he came forward as the representative of the indignant Tiers État. In him a new social order raises its head, angry and threatening. The whole spirit of the Revolution already appears in his language and his attitude. He speaks in the name of the People "who have but to stand still in order to be formidable to their enemies." He questions the honour of those who have attacked him: he summons them to explain themselves, and beyond the boundaries of Provence, beyond even the frontiers of France he takes to witness "an attentive Europe."

Remembering that he was a patrician, he borrowed from history a scathing peroration which has lost nothing of its force or brilliancy or of its incomparable beauty. "In every country, in every age the aristocracy has implacably persecuted the friends of the People; and if, by I know not what turn of fortune, such a friend has arisen from among their own number they have struck at him before all others in their longing to inspire terror by their choice of a victim. Thus perished the last of the Gracchi at the hands of the patricians; but, though he received a mortal wound, he rose to heaven from the dust, calling down the avenging Gods. From this dust sprang Marius, Marius who was less great as the conqueror of the Cimbri than as the destroyer of the Roman aristocratic nobility." This evocation of the past was followed by a terrible prediction of the future. "Woe to the privileged orders, if indeed it is better to be the friend of the people than the

friend of the nobility; for privileges will come to an end, but the people is eternal!" He seems to have foreseen this decisive hour of his destiny. A few days after his arrival in Provence he wrote to his sister: "These people would make me Tribune of the People in spite of myself if I did not hold myself in with all my might." It may be doubted whether he really restrained himself as much as he professed: in any case his tribunate began from the date of his reply.

It may well be supposed that after such a declaration of war, couched though it was in the form of a reply to a provocation, the Noblesse decided that the time was come and the pretext had arisen for the execution of the design which they had cherished since the meeting of the States began. On the proposition of the Marquis de La Fare, first consul of Aix, they decided on February 8 that Mirabeau, not having a title by reason of any property or possessions in Provence, should cease to be present at their sittings. It should be added that this decision was not unanimous, and that even among the nobles there were found wise and courageous men who denounced the illegality and imprudence of such measures. Forced by his "fatal destiny to be always obliged to do everything in twenty-four hours," Mirabeau published on the 11th a *Manifesto to the Provençal Nation*. Though hastily composed this piece has nothing of the air of an improvisation. For the exercise of his talent on general ideas Mirabeau required stimulation and collaboration, but in all that concerned himself, his life, his interests, his passions and his mind his spontaneity was incomparable The *Manifesto* has a movement, a logical cogency, an ironical quality which still command attention, so true it is that "egotism which belittles everything in private life has the power of giving greatness to all things in public affairs." Mirabeau missed none of the advantage given him by the self-contradiction of the Noblesse who had excluded him after admitting him

and after deciding that his title was valid. He rallies M. de La Fare in a tone which recalls the Beaumarchais of the *Mémoires*. "M. de La Fare," he says, "has, no doubt, confused the legitimation of my credentials with that of my opinions. He has taken the view that the right to reject a conclusion implied the right to reject its author." He unveils the unavowable purposes that lay behind his exclusion, and he appealed to the Provençal nation. But his political sense did not desert him, and he predicted that the hour was at hand when "France would have a single, homogeneous, stable and permanent constitution in exchange for which it would be profitable for every one to surrender local rights and pretensions." This was the echo of the debate in which some months earlier the States of Dauphiné had proclaimed that the sacrifice of local prerogatives was the first that was called for in the interests of public liberty. Thus the unity of the nation was being prepared by the abandonment of all privileges.

Meanwhile, however, the clamour aroused at Paris by the publication of the *Histoire secrète de la cour de Berlin* had not died away. Mirabeau's absence facilitated the manœuvres of his adversaries, who were the more embittered as the echoes of the Provençal discussions were making it clear what were his powers and how great a part he was likely to play. At first he regarded all this as a passing impression which need not be taken seriously, but he ended by realizing the boldness of his enemies and the lukewarmness of his friends. He left for Paris on February 15 and saw Panchaud, the Duc de Lauzun and the Duc de Nemours. Talleyrand, enraged by the discredit which the revelations of his financial operations threatened to throw upon his career and his ambitions, absolutely refused to receive him.

Mirabeau returned to Aix on March 6. On the way, at Lambesc and at Saint-Cannat, he was enabled to judge of his popularity. Thousands of people pressed round him

with acclamations and stopped his carriage, he was received with peals of bells and discharges of fireworks. At Aix there was a delirium "of harangues, garlands, cries, embraces, skyrockets, drums, panpipes, deputations, illuminations, an intoxication of joy and confidence." He was received as a deliverer and saluted as father of his country. What a change from the time, only six years previously, when in this very town he had endured the persecutions of usurers, the disdain of his wife, the insolence of the nobility, and the partiality of the judges. But though he was deeply moved he did not lose his head. A new Royal Regulation, while it did not fully satisfy the claims of the Tiers État of Provence, confirmed the doubled number of representatives and reserved the future for further consideration. Mirabeau published a pamphlet in which he wisely counselled a prompt and respectful acquiescence "in order not to give the privileged classes a pretext for realizing their secret wish to evade altogether the holding of States-General."

In order to increase his chances of election, and to provide in case of necessity for a new candidature, he left for Marseilles. The scenes at Aix were renewed there with all the added brilliancy conferred by a hundred thousand voices "from the cabin-boy to the millionaire."

Mirabeau had hardly left Marseilles when he was recalled thither by events. On March 23 a riot had broken out, provoked by the high price of bread and meat. The municipal authorities had been coerced by an armed mob into making a decree lowering prices so much that, had they continued at that figure, all the tradesmen in the town would have been ruined. The house of the intendant had been sacked and more serious troubles were feared. A certain lawyer named Brémont-Julien, basing his request on the admiration which he felt for Mirabeau, begged him to come to the help of the city. M. de Caraman, the military commander, was consulted, and left

it to "Mirabeau's good feeling and ability to do what he could for the public good." On this the tribune could do no less than return to Marseilles, and he did not hesitate. At the risk of losing his popularity he bravely went where his duty called him. The riot had increased in volume. Foreigners whose object was pillage had mixed with the people who only wanted justice. Mirabeau, with the help of a band composed of young men, citizens and dock porters, organized unarmed patrols to re-establish and maintain order. This "citizen militia" purged the town of criminals. Delegates representing all the trades were added to the city council to inspire confidence. For four nights Mirabeau took no rest; he was everywhere and managed everything. The chief difficulty was to persuade the people, who wished to keep prices down even though they knew it would be disastrous. Mirabeau composed, printed, placarded and distributed from house to house an *Avis au peuple Marseillais,* the reading of which is pleasantly surprising. The giant speaks in tones of seductive geniality, with a simple familiarity and a lucidity which recalls the best pages of Franklin. He brings political economy, the laws of supply and demand, the mechanism of bread-making and the solidarity of interests within the grasp of the popular mind. He appeals to the reason of the people, and mingles flattery with persuasion. "All this will be changed," he said, "but it is agreed that it cannot all be changed in a day. . . . I hope, therefore, that you will all say: 'this price will do: it was just and necessary to raise it.' Every man will then be calm in order that others may be so, and your example will produce peace everywhere."

For the time, at least, peace was re-established at Marseilles. But while Mirabeau was working there with a success worthy of his courage, disorder was brewing at Aix. There had been collisions between the military and the populace, and there had been killed and wounded on

both sides. Looting of the granaries followed, and Mirabeau, being informed, left for Aix with all speed. M. de Caraman entrusted him with the duty of securing the safety of the town, the danger to which was aggravated by the fact that it was market day. In pursuance of the trust reposed in him, Mirabeau formed pickets of citizens, occupied the gates, went the round of the ports, harangued the crowd, put the people on their honour to keep the peace, turned back the traders who were coming in from the country, re-established the free circulation of grain, quelled the disorder and resisted with equal wisdom the nobles who wanted the people court-martialled and the people who wanted "some executions as an after-piece."

Some days after these incidents Mirabeau was elected deputy by the Tiers État of Aix and by the Tiers État of Marseilles. On April 7 he decided to sit for Aix, but he went in person to thank the electors of Marseilles. He then left for Paris. His dream was realized; he was a member of the States-General: his public life had begun.

# CHAPTER XI

## MIRABEAU AT THE STATES-GENERAL

An estimate of his mind—His political and religious ideas, his teaching and his experience—His venality—His overtures to M. de Montmorin.

It may be asked what manner of man Mirabeau was, what were his ideas and what were his plans at the time when he appeared for the first time in the politics of his country, whose destinies he was to influence so profoundly, and what had been his preparation for the tremendous part which events compelled or permitted him to play. He was forty years of age, and throughout a dissipated and tempestuous life, punctuated with imprisonment and exile, his will had never wavered for a moment. He had always and everywhere worked with indefatigable tenacity to secure the means of living and learning. His early education had been hasty and imperfect; he revised and completed it. He read and translated the ancient authors; he learned modern languages; above all, he packed his mind with history. His memory was prodigious, and he was an indefatigable taker of notes, always writing, abstracting and compiling. At six years of age his father said that he was "a quicksand in which everything disappeared." At thirty he regarded his son's mind as nothing more than "a mirror in which everything paints itself for a moment and then vanishes." The criticism was unjust. In later days he was compelled to lay aside his prejudice and admit that he had "genius," but the genius lay less in the ideas themselves than in his way of expressing them. The old Marquis was right when he said that "everything in his son came from reminiscence." What Mirabeau

borrowed he transformed, and at once "made it grind out fine phrases." In him the teachings of the *philosophes* and the economists which had been produced before his day found a lingering and sonorous echo. He assimilated the doctrines of others, made them his own, developed them in his writings, and finally imparted to them the force and splendour of an eloquence the incomparable power of which was as yet unsuspected even by himself. These doctrines, at any rate until the convocation of the States-General, were not embodied in a definite programme, nor did they form a distinct and definite whole. They reveal his tendencies, however, and, such as they are, if he did not make them, they were destined to make him what he was.

He was a Royalist. His views and intentions on this point are contained in a passage in a letter to the Duc de Lauzun, dated November 14, 1788: "At the National Assembly I shall be a very zealous monarchist, because I am profoundly conscious of the necessity of killing the despotism of ministers and exalting the royal supremacy." Good citizens who knew the country and nation well could not be in favour of a republican constitution. They felt that France was "geographically monarchical," and no doubt he meant by this somewhat vague, though picturesque phrase, that "the antipathetic aggregations" in the kingdom required the cement of the royal authority. But this authority must not be either absolute or despotic. In his *Lettres de Cachet* he had already affirmed that "the right of sovereignty rests solely and indefeasibly with the people; the sovereign therefore can be no more than the first magistrate of the people." The people does not abdicate but delegates its powers. "The aggregation of representatives is the nation, and all those who are not representatives must have been electors from the very fact that they are represented." This phrase contains the whole theory of universal suffrage, and, when he gave expression

to it in the States of Provence, Mirabeau was in advance of his age. The necessities and the problems of the moment, however, did not escape him. If he agrees in the political interest of the State that the class distinction of the three orders should be maintained, it is only on condition that they shall enter into the constitution of the whole in proportion to their relative importance. "The States are to the nation what a map on a reduced scale is to its physical extent. Whether it be large or small the copy must always have the same proportions as the original." The equality of the number of the commons with those of the two higher orders will be the conquest of prejudice by reason. Assemblies must be periodical and must agree to taxation, must assure the individual liberty of the citizens and the freedom of the press, which is the sole and sacred guarantee of all other rights. The principle of ministerial responsibility must be established, for in it Mirabeau sees "the only foundation for inviolable respect for the royal authority." Liberty without equality would be merely a delusion. Privileges must therefore be abolished; "useful against kings, they are detestable when used against a nation," and the hour of a nation's unity precedes but a little their final destruction. A republic, moreover, which was composed of all these aristocracies would be nothing but "a hotbed of tyranny." The meeting of an assembly "just, wise, apportioned fairly among the different members of the State," would put an end to the intrigues and plots of "these implacable corporations," which, under pretence of defending the general interest and the liberty of the public, think of nothing but the perpetuation of a corrupt and intolerable domination. Mirabeau disapproved of the conduct of the Parlements in overstepping their jurisdiction to enter the political sphere, thus arrogating to themselves a sort of tribunician power. The ministerial despotism of "the frenzied Archbishop" of Toulouse had made them the ostensible

guardians of the rights of the nation. But when on December 5, 1788, the Parlement of Paris, while it supported the doubling of the Tiers État, went on to elaborate a whole programme of reforms, Mirabeau could not refrain from observing that if it was an excellent thing for the public welfare, "it was a strange proceeding for a judicial body." Already he had written to M. de Montmorin: "The Government would be maladroit indeed which placed France under the sway of the Parlements." His political formula against the privileged classes was short, clear and to the point. "The legislative power of the nation under the presidency of its King must be recognized."

Did Mirabeau count on Louis XVI to carry out these reforms and to secure that France should, through a constitution, "realize the development of her high destiny"? In 1780 he alluded to the King's favourite amusements somewhat irreverently by calling him "a pusher of planes"; and somewhat later he pronounced a more profound judgment on him in a reference to "his sincere and inert virtue." In the *Mémoires du Ministère du Duc d'Aiguillon,* in which it is difficult to distinguish between the notes left by Mirabeau and their redaction by the Abbé Soulavie, there is a significant passage on the *volonté de vouloir* which Turgot should have communicated to his sovereign. "This Prince desires the good of his people; placed as he is in the centre of corruption and disorder he would rejoice to secure it. But the fear of doing wrong will condemn him to inaction." Nevertheless, both because he was sure that the King's intentions were honest and because his help was indispensable in reforming abuses if "great civil tumults" were to be avoided, he placed his trust in Louis XVI. In 1775 when he was confined in the Château de Joux he exclaimed: "O Louis! O my King, you love virtue and justice: each step you have taken in the dread career of sovereignty has been signalized by a good deed." In 1787 he laid at the

feet of the sovereign his *Dénonciation de l'Agiotage*. In 1788 he concluded his *Réponse aux alarmes des bons citoyens* with a salute to the monarch "who had so nobly approached his subjects," and invoking the example of Marcus Aurelius, he had expressed the wish that "he should abandon nothing but the power to do evil." Finally, in order to calm the minds of the people of Marseilles, he had appealed on behalf of the "good King whom we must not distress, and who will love and esteem you more and more."

Though he was a Royalist, and though in the absence of energy he confided in the virtues and the goodwill of Louis XVI, Mirabeau was irreligious. In his *Essai sur le despotisme*, as in the *Lettres écrites du donjon de Vincennes*, he had not merely attacked theocracy, he had violently and disrespectfully assailed the Catholic religion and its ordinances. In the *Monarchie prussienne* these attacks had been renewed and aggravated. This "affectation of *philosophisme*" had shocked the Marquis de Mirabeau. The old man had been struck with the qualities "of style and thought" which distinguished Mirabeau's little book on the political reform of the Jews, but he had deplored the totally and manifestly irreligious character of its fundamental propositions, especially in certain details. This time the book was dedicated to him, and his censure had been the more vigorous. He "powerfully and copiously reproached" his son "for rending the garment suited to all shapes which so many great men had kept and made their own." Mirabeau defended himself "in honeyed tones and prepared terms," saying that he had been deeply struck by the course of events in Germany, and that the garment of which his father had spoken was of no use to that people among whom clerical encroachments had always been resisted. Apart from its tone this answer seems really to have expressed his ideas as a statesman which had led him to distinguish

between the respect due to religion and a proper resistance to the political intrigues of which religion is so often at once the cloak and the tool. "When the civil power declares in favour of a religious opinion," he said, when in the Keep of Vincennes, "intolerance is the necessary consequence. In religion, as in all departments of civil life, competition is the surest guarantee of equilibrium. Every man has the right to follow his own judgment in the matter of doctrine, provided that his conduct is in all respects governed by the law, which should protect all forms of religion."

He had inserted this right and this obligation in Article XXV of the declaration appended to his *Addresse aux Bataves*. "All forms of religion should be admitted." Since writing the *Monarchie prussienne* his mind had broadened. In his correspondence with Major Mauvillon there is a letter dated October 22, 1788, in which Mirabeau affirms in lofty terms his "extreme tolerance of all philosophic and religious opinions," the benefit of which he would not refuse even to the "rosary people." He would not "excommunicate anybody, and, indeed, in a sense I find merit in them all. Events, men, things, opinions—all offer a handle, something one can grasp." He found this handle where no one would have expected it who did not know how supple and far-sighted was his political genius. Before the order of the clergy had manifested its resistance he displayed a special solicitude for the parish priests, "these venerable figures whose august and sacred functions have not saved them from feudal degradation, who mix with the people, share the people's needs, the people's privations, misery and tears, and also the people's rigid virtue." It is not difficult to see in this compliment, sincere as it is, a tactical move which was destined to be repeated.

It may next be inquired whether these political and religious ideas proceeded from a complete system of

philosophy. It would be difficult to prove that Mirabeau belonged to any particular school, or that he was the disciple of this or that great philosopher of the eighteenth century. It has been incorrectly said that he did not like Voltaire, of whom he spoke with enthusiasm if not with justice; but "for history and philosophy" he preferred Rousseau and Buffon, and Montesquieu came next in his regard. His admiration, however, did not overcome his independence. Apart from other reserves, he devoted a whole chapter of his *Lettres de Cachet,* full of argument and fact, to confuting the celebrated dictum in the *Esprit des Lois* to the effect that "there are cases in which it is necessary for a moment to put a veil on liberty as one hides the statues of the Gods." I have already said how vehemently he argued against Rousseau that Society in the natural state of man, and that "man is the necessary support of man's weakness." It must, however, be admitted that if Rousseau's influence on Mirabeau was not exclusive it was predominant. The *Nouvelle Héloïse* "developed his sensibility," to use a phrase of which Mirabeau was very fond. But he was saturated with *Émile,* "that magnificent poem" (he underlines the words), that "admirable work which contains so many new truths." Among these truths there was none which he took up, developed and urged with more force than that which is concerned with the physical education of children. The beneficent audacity of his precepts, which have been so tardily (and still so incompletely) put in practice, makes Mirabeau a true precursor whom ingratitude or ignorance has deprived of his due credit.

As regards his economic doctrines Mirabeau owed much to the physiocrats, though he denied that he belonged to their ranks. The amusing, if terrible, abstract which he made while at Vincennes of the principles and maxims of the *Ami des Hommes* was designed not so much to confute the theories of the author, as to establish a contradiction between his acts and his ideas. As a matter of

fact he was an admirer and, even indeed considered himself, a disciple of his father. In 1786, when he was laying Major Mauvillon under contribution for information about Saxony, he adds, "Always from the physiocratic point of view, for I have never had and never can have any other." From this school of thought he accepted the principle that "agriculture is the most important business of a Government," and the necessary consequences as regards taxation which were deduced therefrom by the theorists. He admired Turgot as "a good man, a statesman, a man of genius," and he reproached Necker "for having by his intrigues caused the fall of the only Minister from whom France could hope for regeneration."

Theoretically armed for political action and fortified, in default of a systematic philosophy, by very wide knowledge, Mirabeau, when he entered the States-General, had also the advantage of a practical acquaintance with nearly all sorts of business. In Provence, in Limousin, at Le Bignon, under the direction of his uncle and his father he had been an agriculturist, associated with the labourers of the fields, and the work of tilling the ground had no mysteries for him. As a pleader in civil and criminal cases at Pontarlier and at Aix, he had suffered from the vices of procedure and from the partiality of judges. His own painful experience lent force to his denunciation of the abuses of the judicial system and his clear-sighted advocacy of reforms. As a financial journalist he had been initiated by the most competent men into the mechanism of credit and discount and movable property. With the Bailli he had discussed naval questions and colonial questions on which the ex-governor of Guadeloupe had composed important memoirs. A soldier, he proclaimed that he was "above all a man of war," and if he had not, as he professed, read through the three hundred authors in living and dead languages on the military art it could not be denied that he had made a long and careful

study of military questions. He had travelled much, either by necessity or for his pleasure, and he knew England, Prussia, Holland, and Switzerland. As a diplomatist at the Court of Berlin he had observed from the inside the intrigues and the designs of European politics, and, following the example of Frederick the Great himself, princes, ambassadors, and ministers had not disdained to converse with him.

Then his power of assimilation was prodigious, his insight rapid, penetrating and often prophetic, his culture almost universal, his intelligence prompt and lucid, his self-possession in serious emergencies extraordinary, his oratory many coloured, vehement, clear, supple and incomparable. With all this he was gay, witty and original. He had an innate and all-compelling charm, "a terrible gift of familiarity which enabled him to turn the great round his little finger, but which also attracted the small." Even his creditors were disarmed by his eloquence. His heart was light, fickle, and inconstant, but incapable of rancour or deliberate malice. He had, in a word, all the gifts of a unique genius. What was it that he lacked?

We come back inevitably to what he said so sadly to M. de La Marck passing judgment on himself. "Ah, how the immorality of my youth is injuring the public welfare!" No doubt his youth had been stormy, full of trials and immoralities. But in the eighteenth century debts to money-lenders, some facile adulteries, a collusive abduction and a scandalous divorce were perhaps insufficient in themselves to discredit and condemn a man. Without reaching the throne itself there had been other scandals not far from it which had been quickly forgotten and forgiven. If, therefore, Mirabeau was right in deploring the passions and the errors of his youth, did he not exaggerate the importance of their consequences? They had been noised abroad and had made him famous. In spite of his transgressions (I dare not say because of them) the

most powerful monarch in Europe had twice received him with intimate cordiality, and they had not prevented the virtuous Franklin from entrusting him with a book intended in some sort as a moral appeal to the republicans of his country. If the truth must be told the discredit whose importunate shadow Mirabeau saw fall on his rising fame was not merely the price he had to pay for a stormy youth. In his riper age he had given rise to more serious complaints and to darker suspicions. When his father reproached him with being "in the pay of the speculators" and living on the charity of bankers, he was not merely expressing his habitual hostile prejudice; he was echoing a common rumour. Mirabeau's adversaries did not hesitate to impute interested motives to his financial crusades. They accused him of venality, and the suspicion was so widely spread that his relations, afterwards so cordial and confidential, with the Comte de La Marck were at first impeded thereby. Sometimes, too, his conduct was such as to disconcert his best friends. On the publication of his *Réponse aux alarmes des bons citoyens,* which noisily and unexpectedly espoused the cause of the Ministry against the Parlements, the Duc de Lauzun could not but express his surprise and remonstrate with Mirabeau in terms the vigour and precision of which may be divined from the explanations which he received. Why did Mirabeau *implore* his friend not "to judge hastily even in the most nebulous circumstances"? It may be presumed that the "judgment" referred to had been more severe than a mere difference of opinion about the political situation would have justified. Some months later the *Histoire secrète de la cour de Berlin* had caused a double astonishment. Some (see the *Correspondance* of Grimm and Diderot) were indignant that "a man of parts" should have condescended "to take the paltry pay of a subordinate spy at the Prussian Court." Others attacked the cynical dishonesty of the publication. All mercilessly attacked

the "diplomatic jockey" whose rash imprudence had given them an opportunity of parading their hatred, their jealousy or their fears. This time the Marquis saw clearly enough. "In the end," he said of his son, "he will reap the harvest which comes to people who are wanting in the fundamental principles of morals: no one will trust him, even if he wishes to deserve their trust."

On his return to Paris Mirabeau was enabled to judge by the attitude of the Abbé de Périgord the measure of confidence which he inspired. His old friend at Panchaud's, the correspondent to whom he had written from Berlin, his colleague in the Constitutional Club which had been founded on the convocation of the States-General, refused to see him. Nothing could have brought home to him so forcibly how compromising his company was considered. It would be incorrect to judge by his letters of the sentiments he entertained towards the Abbé. The one object of his compliments and his flatteries was to secure Talleyrand's influence. It was only in private that he expressed his real opinion, which was both harsh and prophetic. In 1787 he defined the Abbé de Périgord in a letter to d'Antraigues as "a vile, greedy, base, intriguing fellow, whose one desire is mud and money. For money he would sell his soul, and he would be right, for he would be exchanging a dunghill for gold." Between these two men, who were so dissimilar, there might be a transitory agreement of interests, but of sympathy such as arises from the harmony of character and the union of hearts there could be none. With his prodigal generosity, his ostentatious dissoluteness, his exuberant ambition, his whole florid and familiar tone and manner, Mirabeau jarred upon the dry elegance, the calculated egotism, the perfidious dissimulation of the Abbé de Périgord. After the publication of the *Monarchie prussienne*, thinking he had grounds for complaint of Talleyrand's criticisms, Mirabeau wrote a letter (the draft, at any rate, exists) in which the laboured

persiflage is more sincere than the affection expressed. The *Histoire secrète* had led to a quarrel, but Mirabeau thought that it would pass off. On his election as Deputy for Aix he had not visited the Abbé "in order not to embarrass him" (these words alone tell us much); but in order to form a new "coalition" with him he had had recourse to the good offices of the Duc de Lauzun. He thought that "the small conventions of coteries should disappear in the presence of great national affairs." The Bishop of Autun evaded the suggestion, and this conveyed very clearly to Mirabeau that his company was considered more dangerous than profitable.

The *Histoire secrète* had caused other troubles. Almost at the moment of its publication he had written to M. de Montmorin (December 28, 1788) a letter of great importance. Looking back on his past he flattered himself (perhaps with excessive complacency) that he had "triumphed over all," but what he said of the future was surprisingly valuable. Once in action Mirabeau rose superior to all the men of his time, because alone among them he knew, if not what ought to be done, at least what he wanted to do. He had ideas, a programme, a method. As a citizen he trembles "for the royal authority, more than ever necessary at the moment when it is on the verge of ruin." This phrase should be remembered and considered. It is the point of departure of a whole policy which it summarizes, announces and prepares. On the eve of the meeting of "a tumultuous assembly which is about to decide the fate of the monarchy," Mirabeau was anxious to know whether the Minister who had convoked the States-General was considering the means whereby he would be emancipated from fear of their control, or, rather, whereby he could work usefully with them. Had he a fixed and solid plan which the representatives of the nation would have nothing to do but to sanction? Mirabeau left no time to the Minister to answer this question which he had put merely in order

to offer his solution. "Here is the plan, M. le Comte," he said. "It is connected with the scheme of a constitution which would save us from the plots of the aristocracy, the excuses of democracy, and from the profound anarchy into which authority, wishing to be absolute, has fallen. If the details of the plan are open to discussion it is, at any rate, impossible to dispute its fundamental principles." A man must be very sure of himself to write like this, and indeed amid all the hesitating and pusillanimous persons who were as undecided about the end as about the means, Mirabeau alone felt that he was strong. More than that, he felt that he was a force. Would they ever "have the courage to call to his duties as a citizen a faithful subject, a brave man and an intrepid defender of justice and truth?" They should meet and come to an understanding without delay. "Three months is not too much in which to prepare to unite the country and to show ourselves willing defenders of the throne and the public good."

M. de Montmorin did not answer! Was he offended by the tone of the letter? Did he fear to compromise himself with Mirabeau, or rather to face the "vindictive humour" of Necker, "the implacable vizier"? One cannot tell. He kept silence until two months later, when he answered a letter from Mirabeau, who was complaining with extraordinary impudence of having been made the subject of newspaper attacks in connection with the *Histoire secrète*, and offered to meet the Minister in order to tell him about affairs in Provence. M. de Montmorin took a high tone of injured dignity, and said that it was his duty to discover and punish the publisher of the correspondence, and expressing regret that the esteem and friendship he had himself shown to Necker had not preserved the latter from the attacks in the *Lettres à Cerutti*. "I should certainly have desired, Monsieur," he added, "to have helped to restore you to a position worthy of your birth and talents, but I see that that pleasure is not

reserved for me." He curtly refused the audience requested. "After all that I have had the honour to say to you in this letter it seems to me, to say the least, useless that I should henceforth have that of receiving you in my house."

This letter was entrusted to the Duc de Lauzun, now the Duc de Biron, on February 2, 1789, but was not delivered to Mirabeau until April 24. The tone of the reply shows clearly how much things had changed in the intervening two months. "Permit me to say, M. le Comte, that your letter has too little of the courtesy of the century which is passing, and too much of its principles. You do not seem to appreciate the time in which you live, and in spite of the respect which I desire to show the King's Ministers and in spite of the affectionate regard which I shall still preserve for you, I cannot omit to observe that threats towards me can come with neither propriety nor grace from any man, whatever his position. As to seeing you, M. le Comte, when I asked for an interview I was no more than a simple citizen, a faithful and zealous subject of the King, who believed himself able to give to you and through you some useful information about Provence and the means of preventing all that has happened there. Well, M. le Comte, I accept with regret as a private person the honour of the proscription which you impose upon me out of devotion to a saint whom you have not always worshipped so fervently. As a public man, which I have become since your letter was written, I declare to the King's Minister that if ever, in the interest of my constituents I have occasion to request an audience, I should think I was doing them wrong if, far from having any need to beg for it, I did not expect to receive it immediately."

There is a great gulf between this letter and that sent by Mirabeau to the same address at the end of 1788. The petitioner has abandoned his attitude of supplication. They

had then refused him employment; he has now a mandate which he uses for defence and attack. They had disdained his services; he now demands an account of their stewardship. For a year or more he had had a presentiment of this position, but throughout his career he had never despaired, neither in the depths of his dungeon at Vincennes, where clothed in rags and shivering with cold he had tried to appease by constant labour the boiling ardours of his imagination; nor in Holland, where he had gained his living as a bookseller's hack; nor in Prussia, where he had raised his obscure mission and had forced the doors of ambassadors and ministers whose equal he some day hoped to become. To a young man, who in July 1788 offered himself as his private secretary, he declared that "the future is in a cloud," but that behind the cloud he felt that the sun of his glory was rising. "Your interests," he continued, "cannot but profit by the variations of my fortune, for these variations can now only be fortunate. The time is coming when the power of talent will be greater and less perilous. Believe me, it is not when public opinion is forming itself that the convulsions of despotism are most to be feared by a man who can speak before that tribunal." When the States-General met that tribunal was open, and Mirabeau was at the bar. For his genius the hour of action had struck at last.

## CHAPTER XII

### FROM THE OPENING OF THE STATES-GENERAL TO THE EVENTS OF OCTOBER 1789

Mirabeau at the States-General—His *début* and first successes—The *Declaration of the Rights of Man;* the "Veto"—Speech on bankruptcy —The events of October—Mirabeau and the Duc d'Orléans.

ALONE in the assembly of about eleven hundred members who constituted the States-General, Mirabeau was famous. His adventures, his misfortunes, and his writings had created for him a reputation and a legend. It was for him first of all that people looked. "It was difficult," says Mme. de Staël, "not to look long at him once one had perceived him. The great mass of his hair distinguished him among all others, and one would have said that his strength, like Samson's, depended upon it. His very ugliness lent expression to his countenance, and his whole person conveyed the idea of an irregular force, but of a force such as might be found in a Tribune of the People." There was more curiosity than sympathy, and above all than esteem, in the attention of which Mirabeau was the object. He was despised and feared. On the day of the opening of the States-General, when his turn came to enter the hall with the deputation from Aix, he was received with murmurs of disapprobation. He supported this first ordeal, the significance of which could not escape him, with scornful pride. His anxiety had been roused "by the fury of hatred and the activity of intrigue," and he expected to be violently attacked even among the Commons when his credentials were examined. His *Journal des États Généraux,* which he had published

without regard to the special regulations of the political press, reflected his bitterness. Not content with attacking the speeches and the plans of Necker, whose popularity was immense, he took a high tone with the Assembly itself. In conversation he was neither more indulgent nor more prudent. Warned by friends, he calmed himself and waited. His *Journal* having been suspended by a decree of the Council, he substituted for it the *Lettres du Comte de Mirabeau à ses commettants*. This audacity, supported by public opinion, vanquished the Keeper of the Seals. The liberty of the press, before being recognized as a right, was thus secured. Mirabeau as an author had always advocated it. It is no more than justice to give him credit for his achievements.

Outside and above the groups which, beneath its apparent unity, composed the Tiers État, he had marked out for himself an independent line of conduct. While Sieyès owed his authority to his theories, Mirabeau expected to derive his influence from the unaided activity of his genius. In the course of his campaign in Provence he had measured the power of his eloquence, and in it he placed his hopes of being able to conquer the prejudices, to break down the resistance, and to secure the assent and subjection of the Assembly. "It is a hard task to have set one's self," he wrote, "to aim at the public good without conciliating any party, without sacrificing to the idol of the day, with no other arms than reason and truth, respecting these always and respecting nothing else, having no other friends than they, and no other enemies than their antagonists, recognizing no monarch but conscience and no other judge than time. Well! I may succumb in this enterprise, but I shall never draw back!"

While he awaited an opportunity of putting this proud speech into practice, his policy was prevailing. He had been the first to see that it would be enough for the people "to stand still in order to be formidable to their enemies."

The inactivity of the Tiers État, its immobility and force of inertia, disconcerted the pretensions of the clergy and the nobility and annihilated their action. Mirabeau did not boast without reason of having urged the dignity and the skill of this attitude. On May 18 he opposed this principle to the proposition of Rabaut-Saint-Étienne, who wanted to send sixteen commissaries to the two other orders to secure their union, and to that of Le Chapelier, who wanted the illegality of their conduct to be demonstrated. Mirabeau distinguished between the two orders. He had no confidence in the proud and usurping manners of the nobility, but he did not despair of the clergy, who, "either from an enlightened conception of their own interest, or from a freer policy," might play the part of a mediator. On May 27, after the abortive conferences, he persuaded the Assembly to send a deputation to the clergy to persuade them to come to the common place of meeting, and thus place themselves "on the side of reason, justice and truth." Had it not been for the unexpected intervention of the King this profoundly politic overture would, no doubt, have succeeded. The King, "in order to contribute directly to a desirable and immediate agreement," proposed the resumption of the conferences of the conciliatory commissaries in the presence of the Keeper of the Seals and commissioners appointed by him, who would report to him what passed. Mirabeau, always vigilant, made clear the dangers of accepting this proposal, which would lead to a decree of the Council, and the inconvenience of refusing, which might enable their adversaries to secure the dissolution of the States on the pretext that their insubordinate independence was destructive of the royal authority. In order to defeat this manœuvre he advised them to accept the King's invitation, but at the same time to inform him, by means of an address, both of their inviolable attachment to his person and of their intention to agree to nothing which would compromise the principle

that the powers of members of the Assembly should be verified in joint session. This counsel prevailed.

These discussions had given Mirabeau the opportunity of displaying in written speeches his abilities both dialectical and tactical. But the orator had not yet revealed himself. A single incident was enough to elicit a ringing and passionate improvisation, which produced the first acclamations with which the Tiers État ever greeted his words. In the course of the sitting of June 11 a deputy protested against the presence on the very benches of the Assembly of a stranger who had passed a note to Mirabeau. Astonishment was on the point of becoming anger, when the piercing tones of the orator imposed silence. He admitted the irregularity of the stranger's presence, but as his friend had been denounced as a pensioner of England he gave his name, and protested against "this odious imputation." It was Duroveray, a Genevese refugee, a former procureur-général, and in flaming words he recalled the history of his life as a citizen and a jurist, devoted with the noblest disinterestedness to the cause of liberty. Dumont, who was present, records that the success of this extempore utterance was complete. It was received with thunders of applause from all parts of the House. "In the tumultuous preliminaries of the Commons, nothing of such force and dignity had as yet been heard. It was a new pleasure, new because eloquence is a spell which can only be cast upon men in an assembly. Mirabeau felt this first success deeply."

The influence of Dumont, a man of wide culture, who had formerly been a Protestant pastor at Geneva, and who had lived much in England, and that of Duroveray had contributed to bring about a meeting between Mirabeau and Necker, a few days before this eventful sitting. Malouet had been their intermediary, for, though he was prejudiced against the deputy for Aix, and deeply distrusted him, he was well aware of the advantage which his talent could

give to the party he might choose to support. Necker did not refuse the interview, but he did not come to terms. He was dry and cold, and showed neither cordiality nor confidence. Such a reception disconcerted Mirabeau, who said, "I shall not try again, but they will soon hear of me." Necker was too sensitive to the attacks which he had so recently had to endure, and failed to perceive what he could do with the force offered to him, both for the furtherance of his own views and for the defence of the monarchy. The opportunity thus missed unhappily did not recur.

Mirabeau's disappointment did not affect his prudence. He had not won over "the idol of the day," but he remained faithful to his purpose of not flattering any party to the detriment of what he believed to be reason and truth. When some members of the clergy had joined the Commons the time had come for the latter to constitute themselves. What title were they to take? Sieyès, in his celebrated pamphlet, had written the prophetic lines, "It will be said that the Tiers alone cannot form the States-General. Very well, they will form a National Assembly." But behind the theorist was the tactician, who thought it imprudent to take this decisive step immediately, and he proposed that the Commons should at first constitute themselves under the title of "assembly of the recognized and verified representatives of the French nation." Mirabeau objected that this title was not intelligible, and might come into collision with a refusal of the royal sanction; moreover, it would alarm people, and would require modification if the privileged orders decided for union.

Are we to believe with Michelet that in taking this position Mirabeau wished to confront the Revolution, to stop it and bar its way? This is to misunderstand him and to judge him on intentions which were not his. As he told Malouet, he feared the evils and the terrible commotions which might result from the ferment arising on

the one hand from the inexperience and exaltation of the Assembly, and on the other from the ill-considered and bitter resistance of the two higher orders. He wished that moderation (he did not fear to use the word) should be joined with courage, in order that what was done might be durable and invincible. He feared (wrongly, it is true) the danger of a prorogation or a dissolution of the Assembly, and perhaps it would have been better not to give expression to the fear, thus suggesting what might not otherwise have been conceived. But he foresaw killing and plundering, and to avoid this without abating a jot of his principles or the rights of the Tiers État, he preached prudence and wisdom and "a constitutional and graduated policy." He was a partisan of a National Assembly, but he did not yet despair of bringing in the privileged orders, and before proclaiming the Assembly without them and against them, he made a last attempt to persuade them to join in taking this step.

The title he proposed, "The Representatives of the French People," seemed to him to be a phrase of magical potency. It had in his eyes the advantage of including everything, and being adaptable to any situation. With it they could "increase the consequence of the Assembly as circumstances might require, if the privileged classes by their errors and their obstinacy compelled them to take in hand the defence of the rights of the nation and the liberty of the people." From this point of view Mirabeau's motion had advantages which were no doubt incontestable, but from the outset it raised an objection which from the very fact of the open conflict of the orders necessarily led to its rejection. The word "people" meant either too much or too little, according as it was extended to the whole nation in the sense of *populus*, or was restricted to a mere fraction (and that the fraction believed to be the less important) in the sense of *plebs*. Neither Mirabeau's arguments nor an eloquent peroration could overcome the legitimate appre-

hension excited by this equivocal term. Mirabeau was overwhelmed with cries and insults. It was the first storm he had encountered, and he met it with the imperturbable coolness which never deserted him. It was not merely his proposal that was against him; it must be admitted that his character had damaged his position, and his past his arguments. He was suspected of having capitulated to the Government. He laughed at the suggestion. "The truth is," he observed, "I sell myself to so many people that I cannot understand why I have not acquired a universal monarchy." At bottom, however, he was wounded, for he knew only too well where lay the weakness by which he was haunted and chagrined. Never, even before he had bound himself, was he believed to be free. The terrors of suspicion, whether it rose out of the misdeeds of the past or clung to the circumstances of the present, weighed on him like a nightmare.

The audacity of the Tiers État in constituting itself a National Assembly was wiser than the calculated prudence of Mirabeau. These two words by themselves made the whole Revolution. From the decisive sitting of June 17 onwards there was hardly an important event in which Mirabeau did not share, or a debate in which he did not intervene. To follow his career is to write the history of the Constituent Assembly, and it is difficult to choose between a dry catalogue of his interventions and an elaborate study of the deliberations and decisions of that body. As it is absolutely impossible to be complete, I must try at least to give some idea of the man himself, as well as of his acts and his ideas, from the speeches which he made.

Was there any unity behind the many contradictions which we find, and was the diversity of the means he used inconsistent with a fixed plan? It will be remembered with what firm self-confidence he had offered a plan of his own contriving to M. de Montmorin, who showed him the

door, and how he wished to discuss it with Necker, who gave him no encouragement. Before he reduced it to a governmental programme he sketched it fragmentarily on various occasions. To Malouet he declared that he did not wish to shake the monarchy; he wished for a free but monarchical constitution. To the Comte de La Marck he partially revealed his ideas, the decisive firmness of which he contrasted with the indecision of Necker. "The lot of France is decided, the watchwords of liberty of taxation agreed to by the people have resounded through the kingdom. We shall be content with nothing less than a Government more or less like that of England." To Major Mauvillon at the same time he appeared in a much more decidedly revolutionary character. "Is it the French People or the hundred thousand individuals who think themselves a caste apart who are to give laws to France?" But he was also a prudent monarchist. "They are angry with me for always suggesting moderate counsels. But I am convinced that there is a great difference between travelling on the map and on *terra firma*. The surest way of making the Revolution abortive is to ask too much of it." The whole man is seen in these contrasts, which are not so much contradictions as different aspects of one policy.

From this moment the general lines of this policy were well defined in his mind. He knew how, where and how far he wanted to go, and in the development of the Revolution he found an unhoped-for coincidence of his ideas and his interests. Hitherto his life had been that of a kind of adventurer, squandering in vain endeavours the resources of his mind and the energy of his character. His dream was to be a statesman, and to prove the quality of the genius which distinguished him from other men. "The time has come," he said, "when men are to be estimated by what they carry in the little space under their foreheads between their two eyebrows." Devoted to the interests of

the People, who "were all to him," and to whom he had united his destinies, he found the only protection of their rights, the sole guarantee of their sovereignty, in a monarchy liberated and liberal, and it is not surprising that as a convinced Royalist he should turn to the King, whom he wished to deliver from the fatal influences which surrounded him, and whose confidence he wished above all things to gain. "The ship of State," he said, "is labouring in a violent storm, and there is no one at the helm." He had the strength to take the helm, but if it was too soon to make him the pilot, could he not at least keep a watch? He said to the Comte de La Marck, "Take care that they know at the palace that I am rather with them than against them." These words date from the end of July, and came close upon some of the boldest speeches on which Mirabeau ever ventured. There was no duplicity in this; at most it was a piece of tactics. The help of the people and that of the King were equally necessary to him, and between the two he held the balance even, for if he was to secure his object he could sacrifice the rights of neither the one nor the other. His convictions and his designs alike imposed this attitude upon him; but in his deliberate independence of party he exposed himself to the alternate suspicions of both sides. His revolutionary poses disconcerted the moderate element, while his prudence seemed treason to the revolutionaries. Between the one party and the other he manœuvred, if not always with skill, at least with a magnificent courage. He excelled at covering his most hazardous moves with a coolness which nothing could conquer. He gave himself up body and soul, with all his admirable qualities and all his terrible defects, to the critical game in which his own destiny and that of his country were alike at stake. For four months he was in the thick of the fight attentive, and indefatigable, in the tribune, in the clubs, at his paper. His name and his handiwork are inseparable from all the great scenes in

which the Revolution was consummated, with the exception of those of August 4. His insight, his audacity, his burning words assured success. They have made him immortal and are known to all.

On June 23, after the Royal sitting which had so unpleasant a resemblance to a Bed of Justice, he hurled at M. de Brézé, who ordered the immovable Tiers to disperse, the devastating reply, "We have heard the intentions which have been suggested to the King, and you, sir, who cannot be his mouthpiece in the National Assembly, have neither a place nor a vote nor the right to speak here. Go and tell them that sent you that we are here by the will of the people, and that bayonets alone shall drive us hence!"

On July 15, when for the third time a deputation went to request the King to send away the troops which threatened the Assembly, he exclaimed in a burst of indignation which shook the whole House, "Tell him that the foreign hordes by whom we are invested were yesterday visited by princes and princesses and by favourites male and female, who loaded them with gifts and caresses and exhortations. Tell him that all night long these foreign satellites, gorged with gold and wine, sang ribald songs predicting the enslavement of France, and that they brutally clamoured for the destruction of the National Assembly. Tell him that in his very palace the courtiers themselves danced to the sound of this barbaric music, and that such were the preliminaries of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew!"

These flaming words, never equalled in the Assembly, made his popularity and created the legend that to-day still surrounds his name. It would, however, be unjust to his fame to attribute it to them alone. Other manifestations of his talent, of his political sense, have been forgotten, which deserve a better fate but which can be recalled here only in broad outline.

Troops, foreign for the most part, had been concentrated in the neighbourhood of Paris and Versailles. All passage was blocked. Everywhere there were military pickets, secret orders, preparations for war. Who was being protected? Who was being threatened? The deputies of the nation, wounded in their dignity and apprehensive for their safety, could not view these provocative preparations without emotion. At the sitting of July 8 Mirabeau made himself their spokesman. He made a speech which was measured as well as urgent, and the effect he produced was great. Was it his own or must we, on the authority of Dumont's *Souvenirs,* attribute the honour of its composition to him in collaboration with Duroveray? There is always a doubt as to the paternity of Mirabeau's speeches, which I shall try to elucidate further on. It may, however, be said at once that if the form of certain of his orations is not entirely his, the inspiration of them comes always from him and him alone. The political ideas, the intentions and methods they affirm are also his. All the sense of responsibility from which he never shrank is in them, and there is therefore no danger of judging him wrongly or of misunderstanding him. If he borrowed the pen of a friend to express his sentiments, he none the less said what he wished to say. When, in his speech of July 8, he spared the King, praised his good heart and distinguished his generous intentions from the maladroitness of his counsellors, he was expressing the opinion which was the corner-stone of his policy. With extraordinary prescience he saw what dangerous consequences would arise from the detestable policy of irritating the people by conflicts between foreign and national troops. "Have they studied," he exclaimed, "in the history of every people how revolutions commence and how they are carried out? Have they observed by what a fatal chain of circumstances the wisest men are driven far beyond the limits of moderation, and by what terrible impulses an enraged people is

precipitated into excesses at the very thought of which they would once have shuddered?"

The impression produced by this prophetic utterance was so profound that the Assembly charged Mirabeau with the task of drawing up an address to the King, requesting him to cancel measures so incompatible with the dignity and the freedom of the National Assembly. He read the address on the following day. It is inspired by the same sentiments as the speech, and though it is perhaps cast in a more pathetic form, it is not less respectful to the royal authority nor less firm in indicating the danger to which that authority was being exposed by rash and foolish counsellors. "There is a contagion in passionate movements. We are but human. Distrust of ourselves, the fear of seeming to be weak, may carry us beyond our purpose. We shall be besieged with violent and extravagant counsels. The calmness of reason and the tranquillity of prudence are silent amid tumult, disorder and faction. Great revolutions have arisen from much less serious causes, and more than one enterprise fatal to a nation has had a less formidable and sinister commencement."

He could not have spoken with more dignity or force; but his advice, dictated by care for the King's interests and the public good, was not followed. The King proposed that the Assembly should be removed to Noyon or Soissons. Mirabeau persuaded them to refuse. "We did not ask to be allowed to escape from the troops, but merely that the troops should leave the capital." He insisted on the public interest, but was neither heard nor understood. The dismissal of Necker precipitated the events which he had foreseen. Irritated, distrustful and driven to extremities by the maladroitness and the provocations of the Court, the populace of Paris stormed the Bastille. The very next day the King was compelled to concede to rebellion what he had refused to good advice; he went in

person to the Assembly to announce the recall of the troops. But unpopular Ministers remained in power. Mirabeau, who definitely took the part of leader, proposed an address to the King, demanding their dismissal. In vehement terms which respected nobody he denounced their policy, their hostility to the Assembly, the ill-starred plan of dissolving it. "Should a Prince who is the friend of his people be surrounded by the people's enemies?" The Ministers resigned of their own accord. Who was to replace them? The Assembly having expressed regret at Necker's dismissal, desired his recall. Mounier contended that in pronouncing either for or against the appointment of Ministers the Assembly was usurping powers which did not belong to them.

To this Mirabeau replied, appealed to the essential right of the people, and for the first time laid down the principle of Ministerial responsibility, "more important, if that were possible, to the King than to his subjects." This short sentence contains a whole political theory which Mirabeau was to make one of the fundamental principles of his policy: he regarded it as nothing less than "the sacred guarantee of social peace."

Social peace unfortunately was every day more imperilled. The murders occasioned by the events of July 14 were followed by others. Foulon and Berthier were assassinated, and it became absolutely necessary to take measures to re-establish and maintain public order. Lally Tolendal on July 23 proposed that a proclamation should be issued to the people, enjoining respect for the law, for the peace and the loyalty due to the sovereign. Mirabeau thought, and with reason, that it was useless to compromise the dignity of the Assembly by half-measures. He saw at once that the cause of the evil lay in the absence of "all recognized authority," and in the confusion which had committed the reins of government to the hands of electors without a mandate. He urged the establishment of elected

municipalities on the basis of a fusion of the three orders, with frequent changes in the Councils and the official staff. It is, however, much to be regretted that, in spite of Mounier's prudent warnings, his desire to gain popularity in the districts of Paris should have led him to sacrifice the superior and inalienable rights of the State to the free and, indeed, anarchical organization of municipalities. Though his motion was not adopted, it was none the less a germ from which deplorable results were before long destined to spring.

As regards his view of the assassinations of July 22, Number XIX of the letters to his constituents has been severely criticized. Mirabeau has been reproached with condoning the excesses of the populace. No one who has read this letter properly can interpret it in this sense. It explains rather than excuses the crimes which had been committed; it certainly does not approve of them. The writer refers to the excesses of the old régime, Vincennes, the Bastille, the refinements of torture in the old punishments, the threats uttered by the enemies of the Revolution, their eager preparations for civil war, and against these he sets "the sudden and impetuous revenge of the multitude." He adds that "the injustice of the upper classes towards the people compels them to seek justice in barbarity." This, no doubt, goes too far; but the explanations which may be thought to err on the side of leniency are followed and compensated by a conclusion which must be given in full. "The whole National Assembly has keenly felt that the continuation of this arbitrary dictatorship was threatening political freedom no less than the plots of its enemies. *Society would soon be destroyed,*[1] if the multitude, grown accustomed to bloodshed and disorder, placed itself above the magistrates and defied the authority of the law. Instead of progressing towards liberty, the people would soon cast themselves into

[1] The italics are in the original.

an abyss of slavery; for it too often happens that public danger rallies men to despotism, and in the midst of anarchy even a tyrant seems a saviour!"

Mirabeau, moreover, had not awaited the disorders which grew out of the July riots in order to warn the people of the dangers of anarchy. On June 23 he had appeared in the character of the impetuous tribune; but the very next day, in the address which he proposed that the National Assembly should send to the electors, he showed himself a true friend of the Government. It seemed to him to be necessary to inform, reassure and calm the nation, who were in danger of being seduced into perilous and criminal follies. He warned them that "agitations, tumults and excesses served none but the enemies of liberty." He referred in severe terms to the resistance of the aristocracy, which he contrasted with the good intentions of the King; but he insisted that those who sought to achieve the public good in other ways should not be treated as enemies. He advised them to make allowance for the prejudices of upbringing, which had been still further developed by fear of licence and of exaggerated claims. His words bore witness to a moderation, a courage, a political sense and insight which have not received their due meed of praise. "All these men deserve our consideration. Some are to be pitied; others must be given time to come back to us. All must be enlightened; and we must not allow to degenerate into selfish or factious quarrels differences of opinion which are inseparable from the weakness of human nature, which result from the multitude of aspects presented by very complicated affairs, and whose diversity is in itself good and useful for the State. . . . We have already to congratulate ourselves on several fortunate and peaceful victories. Not a day passes on which some who at first held aloof come over to our side. Not a day passes on which the horizons of truth do not broaden, and the dawn

of reason does not come for some who have hitherto been dazzled rather than enlightened by its very radiance."

These fine words are stamped with an incomparable wisdom, and in them Mirabeau appears to have foreseen the admirable impulse of enthusiasm which led the two higher orders to complete the sacrifice of their privileges on the night of August 4. Mirabeau's father had died on July 10, and a family gathering prevented him from being present at the immortal scene. M. de La Marck asserts that he disapproved of it, and even described it as "an orgy," and Dumont attributes to him a curious observation on the subject. "How characteristic this is of the French," he is said to have observed; "they spend a whole month arguing about words, and in a single night they overturn the whole ancient order of the monarchy." The testimony of these witnesses agree too well not to contain a certain amount of truth. But it is certainly excessive to contend that Mirabeau regretted the abolition of the feudal régime. His criticism was directed only to the haste with which it was carried out. The suppression of the old order was, in fact, rather proclaimed than executed, and it left room both for repentance and for legal difficulties. The *Courrier de Provence,* which had become his organ, went no further than this, and if he himself, in a letter which he afterwards wrote to the Bailli, deplored the precipitation with which the step had been taken, he defended the Assembly against the reproach of having exceeded its powers.

For the rest he expressed his views in the tribune, and on August 7 he opposed unsuccessfully an amendment of Clermont-Tonnerre, which reserved the King's hunting rights outside his domains.

On August 10 he spoke energetically in favour of the abolition of tithes. It was on this occasion that he said one of his most celebrated things. Speaking of the clergy, he was observing that tithe was a subsidy paid by the

nation as wages to the guardians of morality and education, when he was interrupted by murmurs in the House. Without flinching he replied, "I hear much murmuring at the word 'wages,' and one would think that it was an insult to the priesthood. But, gentlemen, it is high time in the course of this Revolution, which is bringing to birth so many just and generous sentiments, that we should abjure the prejudices of pride and ignorance which despise the words 'wage' and 'wage-earner.' I know only three ways of living in society—a man may beg, he may steal, or he may earn. Is not the proprietor himself the chief wage-earner of all?"

Finally, on September 18, Mirabeau supported with irresistible force of argument Le Chapelier's motion that the decrees of August 4 should be promulgated. "To go back on these articles," he said, "would be an act alike irregular, impolitic and impossible." This view is clear enough to show how impossible it is to maintain that Mirabeau was against the decisions taken on that memorable night.

With Mirabeau more than any other statesman it is a mistake to confound his theory with his practice. His sense of reality sometimes led him to subordinate the former to the latter, and among many examples which might be quoted, none is more interesting than his attitude on the question of the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Here, again, he has been curiously misconceived and misconstrued by those who have studied him too hastily, and perhaps without reference to original documents. It is indeed a singular paradox which would separate him from one of the most durable acts of the Constituent Assembly, which was passed with practical unanimity, and the consequences of which have had their effect on governments which have nothing in common with the Revolution.

On July 12 La Fayette, full of the memories of his glorious expedition to America, had submitted to the

Assembly a draft Declaration of Rights. Mirabeau's nineteenth letter to his constituents described it as "bringing the principles of liberty from the study of the philosopher out of the domain of metaphysical abstractions in order to bring them within the reach of the people, and to consecrate them in their eyes by a national sanction." The letter recognized all the great principles expressed in the Declaration, but pointed out that the detached maxims composing the draft, "in order to obtain their full force should be linked together and developed as resulting from a single truth." In his *Addresse aux Bataves* Mirabeau had tried to link up and develop these principles precisely in this way. He had concluded by giving a table of rights which belong "to all men, and such that without them it is impossible for the human race in any country to preserve its dignity, to perfect itself or to enjoy in tranquillity the gifts of nature." These rights he proclaimed as "anterior and superior to all conventions," and "as inalienable and indefeasible." He declared that it was absurd to subordinate them to a written code, and regarded them as "the common and eternal basis of all political association."

The state of mind revealed by these categorical affirmations dominated the Constituent Assembly. All its members felt the need, powerfully expressed by Mounier, of substituting for "the scattered, doubtful and unstable authority" of the old French constitution a new régime which should distribute power and regulate privileges. A Committee of five members, including Mirabeau, who was made reporter, were appointed to draw up a Declaration. His earlier work and his opinions, which had prepared him for the task, also warned him of the difficulties. A little later, on the occasion of another debate, he recalled the discussion to which the Declaration had given rise, and observed, "We are not savages come from the banks of the Orinoco to form a society. We are an old

nation, too old, indeed, for the age. We have a pre-existing Government, a pre-existing King, pre-existing prejudices. As far as is possible we must adjust all these things to the Revolution, and avoid too sudden a transition."

This reserve, which from the constitutional point of view is so profoundly true, had not the same force in regard to the rights "natural, inalienable, indefeasible," which Mirabeau could not dream of refusing to Frenchmen after having offered the same blessings to the Batavians. Nevertheless, a serious difficulty arose from the pre-existence of "a body politic, old and almost decrepit." The Report presented by Mirabeau in the name of the Committee at the sitting of August 17, betrayed and even avowed real embarrassment. Duroveray, Clavière, and Dumont had collaborated in "this piece of marquetry," with which Mirabeau was far from being satisfied. The draft, which he offered with "extreme diffidence," contained nineteen articles. The work had been too hastily done, and in it there were things good, bad and indifferent, a mixture of confusion and audacity, of Rousseau and Quesnay, but nothing of the brevity and clearness which are indispensable in a Declaration of this kind. Nothing finally survived of it but the preamble.

The Assembly did not give the proposed articles the approval which the reporter himself hesitated to claim. The discussion, which was uncertain and halting, suggested to Mirabeau the idea which he expressed on his own personal responsibility, to postpone drawing up the Declaration of Rights until such time as the other portions of the Constitution were entirely agreed upon and settled. This proposal was received with murmurs. Though from the first he had admitted the difficulty of composing a Declaration "as a preamble to a Constitution which was still unknown," he was accused of contradicting himself. Assemblies are apt to yield to the temptation to blame

those who endeavour to lead them for their own embarrassments. One deputy, amid applause, denounced "Mirabeau's prodigious talent for guiding the Assembly in contrary directions." Another recalled his past. Stung to the quick, Mirabeau proudly replied, after deploring the errors of "a very stormy youth," that "the allegation that I have a talent for guiding you in contrary directions is therefore a senseless insult, a gibe aimed at me from below, which thirty volumes rebut so completely that it is quite beneath my notice." On the main issue he continued to affirm, on the one hand, that a Declaration of Rights was necessary, but on the other that it would be either insignificant or dangerous if it were to precede instead of following the settlement of the Constitution. In support of this position he said a thing which is worth remembering in order to appreciate the continuity of his views on an all-important point. "Either you will never make a Constitution for France, or you will have to find some means of again giving force to the executive and to public opinion, before your Constitution is settled."

The Assembly declined to be stopped by these objections, and continued the discussion, justly anxious to satisfy a desire which had been more generally and urgently expressed than any other. The drafts of Mounier and La Fayette were taken as a basis. Mirabeau intervened several times either to define the responsibilities of the agents of public order, or to protect the liberty of the press against an equivocal formula, or to express his views on the subject of religious liberty. The last point is worth remembering. Mirabeau was opposed to the proclamation of a dominant religion, and thought that there should be no limit to this liberty but the exigencies of public order and tranquillity. Religious liberty in his view was a right and not a concession, and there was a point of theoretical importance in this distinction. "I do not come here," he said, "to preach toleration. In

my view the utmost freedom of religion is a right so sacred that the word toleration, by which it is sought to describe it, seems itself to smack of tyranny. For the existence of an authority which has the power to tolerate is a menace to freedom of thought from the very fact that, having power to tolerate, it has also the power not to do so." I do not think I am mistaken when I claim that the whole theory of religious liberty is contained in this passage, which is too little known, the lucidity and precision of which does not suffer from its conciseness.

On August 7 he opposed the privilege which they wished to reserve to the King, of hunting outside his own domains, but while he condemned this concession to the royal pleasure, he announced that he was a firm supporter of the royal prerogative. "The royal prerogative," he said, "is too valuable in my eyes to allow me to consent to its consisting only in a futile and oppressive pastime. When the question of the royal prerogative arises I shall show at the proper time that it is the most precious safeguard of the people, and you shall judge if I rightly apprehend its proper extent. And in advance I defy the most honourable of my colleagues to carry religious respect for it further than I do."

In his opinion this prerogative so obviously implied the veto, that is to say, the right to refuse sanction, that in the discussion on the denomination of the Assembly he had asserted that if the King had not this right he would rather live at Constantinople than in France. "Yes," he exclaimed, "I solemnly assert that I could conceive nothing more terrible than a sovereign aristocracy of six hundred persons who to-morrow might declare themselves irremovable, and the day after hereditary, and who, like every aristocracy in every country of the world, would end by overrunning everything." Without returning to these oft-renewed and quite categorical declarations, it would be impossible to judge with impartiality the speech which he made in favour of the absolute veto at the sitting

of September 1. He remained faithful to his opinion, the strength of which placed him in opposition to Necker himself, who was a supporter of a merely suspensory veto. Mirabeau's theory was borrowed from a bizarre and confused book by the Marquis de Cazaux, entitled *Simplicité de l'idée d'une Constitution*, which he proclaimed to be a work of genius, taking from it the greater part of his speech. It was a failure. As he read he excited nothing but murmurs, to secure applause he had to improvise commonplaces against despotism, and he had himself to acknowledge his defeat. It would not be of great interest to investigate the value of his arguments, but how is his attitude to be interpreted? He was against the creation of two Chambers, no doubt because, like Rabaut-Saint-Étienne, he thought that "the upper house would be nothing but the constitutional refuge of the aristocracy and the preserve of the feudal system." This reason proceeded not so much from principle, but from the circumstances. But from this very fact, and above all in view of the character of Louis XVI, whose weakness, in the face of the pretensions and intrigues of his Court, had been sadly apparent at the sitting of June 23, was there not an even stronger objection to the veto of the sovereign? The mistake of the people who thought the veto was a person or a tax has seemed ridiculous. But Michelet was right when he observed, "There is nothing ridiculous in this but the mockers. The veto was, in fact, the same thing as a tax if it prevented reform and reduction of taxation. The veto was, in fact, extremely personal; a man was to say without giving reasons, 'I forbid,' and that was to be the end of it."

Mirabeau required his revenge, and soon obtained it with a power of argument and a brilliancy of language in which he surpassed himself. It was on the occasion of the discussion of the financial situation. But before this crucial debate, in which he gained immortal glory, he performed an important service to the Assembly in

opposing the proposal of M. de Volney, who demanded that the Constituent Assembly should be dissolved, and that the members should not be re-eligible. Against dissolution he was not content to remind them of the oath of the Jeu de Paume, which bound the deputies to remain at their posts until after the Constitution was voted. He pointed out that the very mistakes of the Assembly would give them experience which would enable them to open by common consent a new era of peace and goodwill. "If," he said, "we put other deputies in our place, the first moment might well be the moment of an outbreak of war." Against the proposal that they should not be eligible for re-election he invoked the nation's sovereign rights. "We should be giving orders to the nation! In elections henceforth there would be another principle than that of confidence and free choice. Let us never forget that it is our duty to consult but not to dominate public opinion!" This exalted wisdom, so prudent and so prophetic, prevailed against the unreflecting impulse of disinterested modesty which had been aroused in all quarters of the House by Volney's motion. As is only too well known, the inspiration of this speech did not survive the orator. When the Assembly was deprived of his insight and was no longer dominated by his courage in seeing and proclaiming where their duty lay, the Constituent Assembly committed the irreparable blunder from which the great tribune had saved it.

In the same speech of September 19 Mirabeau agreed on behalf of the Finance Committee that the Assembly should devote two days a week to the consideration of financial questions. The urgency of the matter had never escaped him. "It is the public debt," he said on April 24, "which was the germ of our liberties." This terse saying throws a flood of light on the long-standing and deep-seated causes of the Revolution which are well known to history. The deficit had led to the States-General, and

through them to the proclamation of a new order of things. But liberty, necessary as it was and now secured in public matters, was not in itself sufficient to solve the fiscal problem. Necker seemed to be more and more unequal to his task. Moreover, whatever he might do, Mirabeau was unable to make up his mind to give him his confidence. For a proposal to borrow thirty millions he tried unsuccessfully on April 8 to substitute another whereby, in order to save the rights of the nation, the deputies subscribed an engagement to guarantee the sum personally. The loan was voted at 4½ per cent. and did not succeed. Mirabeau pointed out the mistake the Assembly had made in imposing on the Minister a rate which was lower than in the case of other public funds. He brushed aside "vain declamations against financiers, men of business, bankers and capitalists," and he twice (August 17 and 24) proclaimed the necessity, which was becoming more and more imperious, of guaranteeing the security of the National Debt against all attack.

The situation having grown worse, Necker proposed on September 24, among other measures, a voluntary and patriotic contribution equivalent to a quarter of the revenue. This was a mere expedient, but what was to be done? To reject it was impossible. "The revenues of the State were annihilated, the Treasury was empty, the forces of the State were bankrupt." To modify it meant to lose precious time in examining the whole resources and necessities of the State, and to check figures the bare verification of which threatened to take months. The only course seemed to be to accept, and it was justified both by the gravity of the circumstances and by the confidence which the nation had in the Minister. On behalf of the Committee of Finance Mirabeau supported Necker's proposals, which he asked the Assembly to adopt, but not to guarantee, as there was neither the time nor the means to criticize them. If they succeeded, so much the better,

for the Assembly, whose consent had prepared the way. If they failed, the Assembly would at least keep its credit intact and ready for public emergencies. "Let us take a more optimistic view," said Mirabeau. "Let us decree the proposals of the first Minister of Finance, and believe that his genius, aided by the resources of the finest kingdom in the world, and the fervent zeal of an Assembly which has set, and should still set, such splendid examples, will show itself equal to the needs of the time."

Convinced by this pressing language, the Assembly directed Mirabeau to draw up a draft decree in this sense. Mirabeau, on the one hand, admitted the impossibility of making a profound and detailed examination, and on the other pointed to "the boundless confidence reposed in the experience and ability of this Minister by the whole nation." Mme. de Staël describes this attitude on the part of Mirabeau as "astute"; M. A. de Lameth emphasizes what he regards as its "malignity"; in the Assembly it produced a mixture of impressions. The "provisional dictatorship" which Mirabeau was conferring on a Minister whose person and whose plans he had never spared seemed suspicious. Some accused him of flattering Necker, others of trying to compromise him. He explained himself with much frankness and loyalty in a second speech. He did not deny that he rated the credit of the National Assembly higher than that of the Minister of Finance, or that he would have preferred other plans (in particular an obligatory contribution wisely arranged) to the uncertainties of a voluntary levy. But "this opinion, like any other, lacks the force of proof. I may be wrong, and I have not had the time to discover for certain whether I am wrong or right." His conclusion was that "for the sake of the country" Necker's project should be adopted, and in a vehement peroration he adjured his colleagues to sacrifice "all rancour, hatred and distrust on the altar of the public good."

Nevertheless, the Assembly still hesitated, and various motions were submitted. How were they to be convinced? For the third time Mirabeau ascended the tribune. Having said all, what could he add? Any other man might have run the risk of compromising his case by repetition. But he, magnificent, impetuous, exalted by the very difficulties of the situation and his task, repeated himself only to renew and surpass his previous efforts. His exordium was familiar and urgent in tone, and put the question which dominated the case, "Have you a plan to substitute for that proposed to us by the Minister?" An isolated, anonymous, and imprudent "Yes!" was the reply. The interruption was fortunate for the orator. He seized upon it, retorted it, dislocated and refuted it, and after its annihilation he returned to Necker's plan. Once again he proclaimed its inevitable necessity, and penetrating designs which could not be avowed, but which existed in certain wavering minds, he pronounced "the infamous word 'bankruptcy.'" From that moment the tone of his speech changed. It became like the announcement of a revelation, the revelation of a secret, the explanation of a mystery. "My friends, hear one word, one single word," and with this he led his attentive, breathless and anxious audience to the verge of "the appalling gulf dug by two centuries of depredations and robberies." "This gulf must be filled. Well! Here is the list of landed proprietors in France. Choose the richest in order that fewer citizens may be sacrificed. But choose! for is it not necessary that a few should perish in order to save the mass of the people? . . . Strike! Sacrifice these trembling victims without pity: cast them into the abyss and it will close. You shrink back with horror! Most inconsequent and pusillanimous of men!" Was not bankruptcy an act a thousand times more criminal—bankruptcy which would rouse to a terrible explosion of fury millions and millions of men? Impoverished, deceived and ruined, what was not to be feared

from their just resentment and anger? "Stoical contemplators of the incalculable ruin to be vomited over France by such a catastrophe; impassible egotists who think that these convulsions of despair and misery will pass as so many others have passed, and all the more speedily as they will be more violent—are you quite sure that so many men without bread will leave you to the tranquil enjoyment of the rich repasts which you refuse to reduce in quantity or in delicacy? Nay, you will perish, and in the universal conflagration which you do not fear to light the loss of your honour will not save a single one of your detestable sensualities!" The House shuddered at this terrifying and brutal picture. His hearers lost all power of judging or deciding for themselves. They were cowed by an all-powerful genius; they were dominated and carried away. He spoke no more to them of principle and of liberty. With an audacious realism which does not seek to dissimulate, he appealed "to the most ordinary prudence, to the most trivial common sense," to the most vulgar self-interest. Even from this point of view there was room for neither hesitation nor delay. "Beware how you ask for time; misfortune never permits procrastination. Why, gentlemen, when there was lately some trifling commotion at the Palais Royal, a ridiculous insurrection which never had any importance except in the feeble imagination or the perverse designs of some perfidious men, you heard the words 'Catiline is at the gates of Rome, and you still deliberate!' And yet it was not Rome, and we were beset neither by Catiline, nor by any serious danger or faction. But to-day bankruptcy in all its horror stares us in the face, and threatens to consume you and your properties and your honour, and you deliberate!" At these words the Assembly rose "as if they suddenly saw the abyss of the deficit open at their feet demanding victims."[1] A vote was taken, the decree was carried with enthusiasm,

[1] Ferrières.

and Mirabeau seemed to the House to be a unique being whose eloquence could never be rivalled. Friends and foes bowed before the superiority of his genius. Necker's daughter, Mme. de Staël, was vanquished by his "impressive" voice, by his biting words, by his "prodigious life and power," and when in later days she calmly recalled the unforgettable memory of that day, she followed Garat in summing it up in Æschines's remark about Demosthenes, "What would you think if you had yourself seen the portent?"

On Mirabeau's proposition the Assembly had decided to send the address to the people, to explain to them the measures taken, and to appeal to its enthusiasm and sense of honour. The illustrious orator was charged with the duty of drawing it up. He could not do everything, and, moreover, was in the habit of relying on collaborators. He therefore passed on the duty to Dumont. The draft was read at the sitting of October 2; it was an enfeebled and declamatory echo of Mirabeau's speeches, and it had less effect on the people than they had had on the House. In the precipitate course of events men's minds were already turned in another direction. Indignation had been roused by the news that on the previous day at a banquet to the bodyguard, at the end of which the King and Queen had imprudently been present, the white cockade had been noisily paraded instead of the tricolour. These scenes were renewed two days later, with details which aggravated the audacity of the counter-revolutionaries. If not the reason, they were at least one of the pretexts which provoked the exodus of part of the populace of Paris to Versailles on October 5 and 6, the invasion of the palace, and the King's enforced return to Paris. The real cause of this brief insurrection remains very obscure, and it is difficult to discover who were the responsible and guilty parties. Was it a spontaneous outburst of popular irritation, distrust and impatience? Was it a plot of the Duc

d'Orléans against the Court, and especially against the Queen, whom he hated? Was it a desperate conspiracy fomented by the partisans of the *ancien régime* against the Revolution, which by its very excesses was intended to provoke a sanguinary repression? Or was it an unforeseen combination of all these elements? Each historian has his theory based upon evidence or prejudice.

Mirabeau's participation in these days of bloodshed and anarchy, whether in the interest of the Duc d'Orléans or for his own purposes, raises the same contradictions. Mounier is his chief accuser. In spite of the weight attaching to such a name, history has pronounced against him, and has adopted the opinion loyally expressed by Mallet du Pan, one of Mirabeau's most passionate opponents. Ten years after the event he wrote that "after trying for long to penetrate the mystery of October 6, after comparing accounts of all kinds and gathering authoritative testimony he had convinced himself that Mirabeau had no share either in the premeditation or in the execution of this crime, the mingled threads of which will never be clearly unravelled." The proceedings opened by the Châtelet gave Mirabeau himself the opportunity of making a personal explanation in a speech which he delivered on October 2, 1790. He never displayed more dignity or moderation, more logical clearness or more alert, witty or delightful cleverness. It is impossible not to accept as convincing the account which he gave. To this defence M. de La Marck has added his unquestioned testimony by stating that Mirabeau spent the greater part of October 5 with him studying the troubles in Brabant and also by placing in a clear light his friend's relations with the Duc d'Orléans. I therefore hold that the case against Mirabeau presented by Mounier, who after October 6 fled before the Revolution which he had courageously promoted, has been decided finally in Mirabeau's favour,

and I do not think it necessary to go into any further historical details.

But it is not enough to say that Mirabeau took no part direct or indirect in the events of October 5 and 6. We must add that he was never in the confidence, still less in the pay, of the Duc d'Orléans. The mediocrity of the Prince, his timidity and indecision, never inspired any confidence in Mirabeau. His own plans were too vast, too well thought out and too serious to allow him to associate so irresolute a character with their execution. If (which is more than doubtful) he thought for a moment of making him Lieutenant-General of the Kingdom it was only for a moment. Could he have asked such a man for money? Could he even have accepted it from him? M. de La Marck did his best to destroy by citing a simple fact the imputation which is sufficiently rebutted by Mirabeau's prudence, leaving his scruples out of account. "Mirabeau has been accused of putting his hand into the coffers of the Duc d'Orléans, and it was at the very moment when these treasures were being showered upon him when he came to me in a timid and embarrassed way, asking for the loan of a few louis!" The same witness adds that some days before the events of October the Duc d'Orléans and Mirabeau dined with him, and that he particularly noticed that there was between them "so much reserve that the idea of a secret understanding between them was out of the question." Completely free in this quarter, Mirabeau was looking and acting elsewhere. It was his relations with the Comte de Provence and with La Fayette which marked the second period of his career in the National Assembly. In this new phase the orator persisted and transformed himself without falling below himself, but he now aspired to statesmanship.

## CHAPTER XIII

### FROM THE EVENTS OF OCTOBER 1789 TO THE TREATY WITH THE COURT

The Comte de La Marck—Memorandum by Mirabeau (October 15, 1789) —La Fayette—Mirabeau wishes to become a Minister—The Comte de Provence: projected treaty with the Court—Mirabeau against Cazalès and Robespierre.

MICHELET has written that after the terrible awakening of the events of October, "the two leading men in France, the most popular and the most eloquent, La Fayette and Mirabeau, returned to Paris royalists." That was true of La Fayette. The part he had played during the course of those tragic events, the fear of delivering the young Revolution up to excesses which would be its ruin, the heroic protection he had given Marie Antoinette on the balcony of the palace of Versailles in the sight of a mob that was at first amazed and then charmed and delighted, had brought the Republican general of the American War over to the monarchy. Mirabeau stood in no need of conversion. He had never ceased to be an avowed royalist. His most revolutionary speeches had admitted the necessity for a firmly established constitutional monarchy. But the inertia which vitiated the King's best intentions, the Queen's resistance, the intrigues of the Court, alarmed his patriotism and disquieted his monarchical faith. He feared the worst. On the day following the events of June 23, he said indignantly to Étienne Dumont, "Such things lead kings to the scaffold." Later, about the end of September, speaking of the Court, he declared in the presence of M. de La Marck, "What are these people thinking of? Don't they see the abyss opening at their feet?

All is lost: the King and Queen will perish and the mob will trample their bodies underfoot!"

This terrible prediction alarmed M. de La Marck. He was an Austrian nobleman of the Arenberg family, which was one of the most ancient and illustrious princely houses in Europe. A brilliant officer, a colonel in a Languedoc regiment, he had come to France shortly after the marriage of the Dauphin. His family and the protection of the Empress Maria Theresa had assured him a distinguished position at Court. He was admitted to Marie Antoinette's intimate circle. A keen observer, absolutely disinterested, obliging, faithful and loyal, he closely followed the events that were moving so swiftly in France. He had made Mirabeau's acquaintance in 1788 at a dinner given by the Prince de Poix, Governor of Versailles. The impression made on him then is worth quoting, as it gives us one of the best portraits ever drawn of the renowned tribune: "When he saw Mirabeau enter, M. de La Marck was struck by his appearance. He was tall, squarely and heavily built. His head, which was extraordinarily large, was made even larger by a vast mass of curled and powdered hair. He wore a town coat with very large buttons of coloured stone, and shoe-buckles of an equally exaggerated size. His whole costume was marked by an exaggeration of the fashion of the time, which suited but ill with the taste of the men of the Court. His features were disfigured with pock-marks. The expression of his countenance was sombre, but his eyes were full of fire. In his desire for elegance he exaggerated his salutations: his first words were ponderous and vulgar compliments. In a word he had neither the manners nor the speech of the society in which he found himself, and although by birth he was the peer of his hosts, yet it was easy to see by his manners that he lacked the ease which comes from frequenting the great world."

Mirabeau's conversation, copious and powerful, witty and

brilliant, fortunately compensated for what was ridiculous and second-rate in his bearing. His views on Germany, full of sound ideas, and eloquently expressed, delighted M. de La Marck. They became friends. The meeting of the States-General, in which M. de La Marck represented the bailiwick of Quesnay, brought together the two men, who in spite of many divergencies of taste and opinion, had so much in common, and set up a warm and confident sympathy between them. M. de La Marck soon saw how Mirabeau's genius and popularity could be turned to account. Rejected by the Government, misunderstood and despised by the Court, conscious of his power and impatient for action, Mirabeau had no hesitation in saying, "On the day when the King's ministers will bring themselves to discuss matters with me they will find me devoted to the Royal cause and the safety of the monarchy." These words led M. de La Marck to approach the Keeper of the Seals, M. de Cicé, Archbishop of Bordeaux, but without result. He was not discouraged, and, understanding with rare insight the gravity of what had happened, he did not hesitate to turn to the Queen. Marie Antoinette told him bluntly that she was not of his opinion: "We shall never be so unfortunate, I think, as to be reduced to the painful extremity of turning to Mirabeau for help."

Meanwhile the Revolution took its course: Mirabeau was always in the foreground. On October 5 he had protested in moderate terms, as he demanded the necessary explanation, against the letter in which the King had accepted with reservations the constitutional decrees and adjourned the sanction of the Declaration of the Rights of Man: he had especially insisted on every act of the King's being accompanied by the signature of a Secretary of State: "for without it the salutary law of responsibility will always be set at nought."

Pétion had denounced the banquet of the bodyguard.

Mirabeau, without attempting to elucidate "this culpable act," proposed to "forbid the guard holding these festivals of spurious patriotism, which were an insult to the misery of the people and might have fatal consequences." When an ill-inspired member of the Right insisted on making Pétion produce a written denunciation of what had happened, Mirabeau declared that he considered such a denunciation extremely impolitic, but he added: "However, if it is insisted on, I am ready to furnish all the details and to sign them; but first I shall ask this Assembly to declare that the King's person is alone inviolable, and that all other persons whatsoever are equally subject and responsible to the law." This exposed the Queen, and these menacing words must have rung dolorously in her ears and revealed to her the power of the man she despised.

When the Assembly was invaded Mirabeau protested against the scandal, and forced the President to clear the hall to save the dignity of debate. So great was his popularity at that time that he was applauded even by those whom he insisted on expelling. He procured the rejection of the proposal that the Assembly should sit in the King's presence. "It is not fitting to our dignity," he declared; "it is not even wise to desert our posts at a time when imaginary or real dangers are threatening the public good." Finally, on hearing that the King had returned to Paris, he procured a decree that "the King and the Assembly should be inseparable during the present session." "Let me point out to the Assembly," he said, "that a sound policy should lead it to promulgate an act of such importance without hesitation."

Thus, during these two days, Mirabeau once more appeared in his twofold capacity: moderate and enthusiastic, energetic and far-seeing, a defender of the rights of the people, whose excesses he condemned, indulgent with the King, whom he knew to be more hesitating than ill-intentioned, hard on the imprudence of the Court, whose temerity too

nearly resembled defiance. The day after the King's enforced return to the Tuileries he went to see M. de La Marck. "The King, the royal family, France too," he said, "are lost if the royal family does not leave Paris. I am evolving a plan to make them go: would it be possible for you to go and assure them that they can count on me?" A few days later he produced this plan, dated October 15. It is a capital piece of work, as strong in its general conception as it is clear, sober, eloquent in expression. Mirabeau's ideas were expressed in it with a frankness and confidence which prove his sincerity. Although to abstract it may weaken it, yet it is too long to be cited in full: and I may at least try, without falsifying its spirit to present its essential details.

What was Mirabeau's aim? To assure the success of the Revolution, and bring it peacefully to a head, to allow the King to form a "coalition" with his people. Whatever the deplorable mistakes committed by the National Assembly in its misdirected, ill-composed form, its lack of experience and excess of numbers, it did render services of inestimable value. It was still sustained by the gratitude and hopes of the people. In reality there had been in its blunders more "mistakes in administration than in principle." The exemptions and privileges which, backed by universal opinion, it had destroyed, could never come to life again: the whole nation would rise up against them. "The abolition of the feudal system was an expiation due to ten centuries of madness." The Assembly must, therefore, be preserved, for the people found it good. But neither the King nor the Assembly were free. The "excited populace," which had brought them back to Paris, would continue to dominate them by the "anarchical tyranny," to which the weakness of ministers without authority as instruments had given rein. How then was peace to be restored to the State, power to the army, the power of action to the executive, its true rights to the

monarchy, the rights which were indispensable to public liberty?

Certain worse than bad solutions, which would bring about the most frightful consequences and the inevitable ruin of the King, must at once be discarded. To retire to Metz or any other place on the frontier would be to declare war on the nation and abdicate the throne. A King, who is the only safeguard of his people, does not fly before his people. He accepts his people as the judge of his conduct and principles, but he does not suddenly break all the ties which bind them to him, nor stir up disaffection, nor place himself in the position of only being able to return to the seat of his Government armed, nor will he be reduced to craving help from abroad." Mirabeau adds: "If such a thing were to happen, I would myself denounce the monarch."

It would be no less dangerous to withdraw to the interior of the kingdom, appeal to the nobility and make alliance with them. That would mean choosing between a great people and a few individuals whom that people regarded as their most implacable enemies.

Discarding such expedients, "it being impossible to think of evading a great danger without danger," the King's departure was the last resort for the public good and his own safety. From the military, political and economical point of view Rouen would be the most suitable town. The departure would be carefully planned and would take place openly. The King would plead the necessity for regaining his liberty in order to approach his people more nearly, and to deprive the malcontents of any excuse for disregarding the authority of the Assembly's decrees. He would proclaim that he took no less interest in the Revolution than the most ardent friends of liberty; that he, as the head of the nation, had planned to invest it with all its rights; that, without exception or reservation, he renewed the sanction and adherence he had

given to the decrees of the Assembly; that the public debt was pledged by the national honour, that the Parlements were definitely abolished, and, finally, that, desiring to live the life of a private individual, he would henceforth be content with a million for his personal and family expenses.

The Assembly would be invited to attend upon the monarch, from whom it had declared its inseparability, and, if it refused, it would be replaced by another legislature. Proclamations, instructions, correspondence would enlighten public opinion, and "it would soon be seen what respect and affection for a good Prince can do for a faithful and generous nation, than whose welfare nothing has ever been desired by the Prince, who is himself as unhappy as his people."

This "plan for the public safety," which rested on the indivisibility of the monarch and the people, was entrusted by M. de La Marck to Monsieur the Comte de Provence, the King's brother, to be laid before the Court. Monsieur made certain reservations as to the methods of execution, but approved of the general scheme. But he refused to communicate it to the Queen, and no doubt he did not inform the King either, for he was afraid of his irresolution.

Thus repulsed, rejected or misunderstood by those whose safety he was concerned to preserve, seeing in their safety the fate of the nation involved, Mirabeau had reason to believe that another resource was open to him. He did not like or respect La Fayette, whose quasi-dictatorship did not seem to him to be justified by the intellectual gifts or the character that he most prized. But he could not shut his eyes to the fact that the general's popularity was a formidable weapon. For his part, La Fayette was filled with very strong prejudices against Mirabeau based on the Tribune's youthful vagaries.

The departure of the Duc d'Orléans, forced on the Prince by La Fayette after the events of October, violently

irritated Mirabeau, who thought such despotism most imprudent. There was very nearly an explosion. Dupont, Alexander de Lameth and Barnave intervened and demanded an interview, which took place in their presence at Passy in the house of Mme. d'Aragon, Mirabeau's niece. There was a discussion of the general situation, which gave rise to many fears, and of the weakness of the Ministry, which seemed impotent to face the position. They agreed as to the necessity of finding a substitute for Necker in the Government, and also of replacing many of his colleagues with members chosen from the Assembly to the exclusion of all the deputies present. Mirabeau is reported by Lameth to have said: "In this instance I have not the honour of self-sacrifice, for I know that I have raised a mountain of prejudice against me which it will take time to demolish." Other names were discussed and chosen. But the project came to nothing, either because La Fayette hesitated to move against Necker, or because he could not succeed in overcoming the King's opposition.

Thenceforward for three or four weeks there were continued relations between Mirabeau and La Fayette, dinners, conversations, discussions, plans. Mirabeau at first tried to approach Necker and Montmorin, and had a long interview with them which produced no result. Everything, both in the attitude of the Ministry and that of the Court, led him to La Fayette. M. de La Marck, who had not renounced his desire to turn his friend's genius to account; M. Talon, the Civil Lieutenant of the Châtelet, who wanted to become a minister; M. de Cicé, the Keeper of the Seals, who was calmly betraying his colleagues, and M. de Sémonville, a deputy, were all mixed up in negotiations of which it is difficult to discover the thread. Mirabeau's public influence was shown on October 19 when, during the first sitting of the Assembly at the Abbaye, he procured a vote of thanks to Bailly and

La Fayette for the attitude adopted by those "virtuous citizens" during the recent disturbances. Two days later, on the occasion of a vote on supplies, Mirabeau drew up an attack on the Ministry.

He was in great financial straits. "I find it hard to move," he wrote on October 21 to M. de La Marck. "I am hemmed in by minor obligations which in the mass are a solid wall. I am very much hampered in my social intercourse, both because I cannot look after my affairs, and because as long as I have any ambitious project I cannot break up my factory. I cannot accept any solid assistance without some office that would make it legitimate: any small loan would only gratuitously compromise me. . . ." He received a loan of 50,000 francs, partly from La Fayette, which he repaid. As for the office, this took the form of the promise of a great ambassadorship to Holland or England, on which M. de Montmorin adhered.

Mirabeau preferred a post in the Ministry to an embassy. La Fayette was hostile at first, but visibly weakened. It appears that about the end of October he had made up his mind to agree, and Mirabeau had reason to believe that his dreams were about to be realized. There are two draft ministries drawn up in his hand. He appears by name in one. Necker was to be Prime Minister, "because he must be made as powerless as he is incapable; and yet preserve his popularity with the King." La Fayette was to go to the Council, become Marshal of France, and commander-in-chief, so as to reconstruct the army; Mirabeau himself was to be appointed to the King's Council, but to have no department. His way of judging the reasons for and consequences of his nomination is curious: "Minor scruples of respect of persons," he says, "are no longer in season. The Government must openly declare that its chief assistants will henceforth be sound principles, character and talent." What has become of the heaped-up prejudices which for so long had set an insurmountable barrier round Mira-

beau? A little time and much skill had been enough to demolish them. The second draft, which distinguishes between La Fayette and the Queen, in which also Talleyrand and Sieyès figure, does not contain Mirabeau's name, but there is no doubt that he had assigned himself the same part as in the first.

"Reciprocal confidence and friendship: that is what I give and look for," he wrote to La Fayette on October 29. He added, underlining the words: "What would you say in case Necker threatened to go if Mirabeau were appointed? Give your mind to it." This letter proves conclusively the support given by the General to a Ministry which would include the Tribune.

These negotiations did not take up the whole of Mirabeau's time, and he was careful not to neglect the Assembly where, he knew, his greatest power lay. He took part in several discussions. On October 14, the day after an unjust attack in which he had mistakenly implicated the Comte de Saint-Priest, a Minister of State, he proposed a law relating to riotous meetings, so as to prevent disorder, which not only "might have the most fatal results on the liberty and safety of citizens," but were also likely to "compromise union and the stability of the monarchy." Mirabeau clearly never let slip an opportunity for bringing together and associating the two great interests to which he had with equal zeal devoted himself. His scheme, combined with Target's, took shape after the assassination of the baker François (October 20), in the famous martial law. Before it was put to the vote, Mirabeau made an observation which reveals his most constant preoccupation, about preserving "against the annihilation," the executive power to which he proposed to give the necessary resources and means for becoming active and responsible.

On October 30 he delivered a great speech during the important debate opened a few days before by the Bishop

of Autun's proposal to give the State, in order that it might put its finances in order, the property of which he claimed that the clergy were not the owners but only the usufructuaries. This was carrying to its logical conclusion the thesis set forth by Turgot in his famous article on *Fondations* in the *Encyclopédie*. Mirabeau did not entirely agree, but adopted the essential idea. The speech he delivered is admirable in its dialectic and its juridical argument, the force of which cannot be denied even by those who contest its accuracy and justice. Its style bears no resemblance whatever to Mirabeau's usual eloquence. No doubt the Tribune called in the pen of one of his collaborators who was more fitted than himself to deal with such a subject. But he was expressing his own ideas. They dominated the decree of the Assembly which placed the ecclesiastical property at the disposal of the nation, and allotted to every parish priest a minimum annual stipend of 1200 francs.

Meanwhile the negotiations for the constitution of a Ministry made no progress. The Keeper of the Seals, who deceived everybody, paid Le Pelletier to write the celebrated anti-Mirabeau pamphlet, *Domine salvum fac regem*. La Fayette, who was "equally incapable of breaking faith and of keeping his word *ad tempus*," could not bring himself to any decision. Such hesitation made it possible for a cabal to be formed in the Assembly against Mirabeau. He determined to take matters into his own hands. The weakness of the Ministry was becoming more and more obvious. It was doubly compromised by the clumsiness of its actions and its deplorable inaction. Mirabeau still thought and said forcibly that "the National Assembly must be made to transcend its own measures." By attacking a Ministry whose indecision was as dangerous to royalty as to liberty, he brought his principles into line with the designs of his ambition. On November 5 in the Assembly he denounced the Grand

Provost of Marseilles, whose measures, directed against the plotters of sedition, were contrary to the recently promulgated decrees. He blamed the ministers for this situation, and pointed out the danger of having an executive power which was "hostile to the legislative body instead of being auxiliary to it." The conclusions which he had put to the vote of the Assembly, which was jealous of its prerogative and susceptible to his flattery, came very near to being a defiant vote of censure. He was right in regarding it as a "battle won." The game, he thought, had taken a giant stride. Would La Fayette at last understand, make up his mind and act? Mirabeau assured him of his "personal fidelity," and asked for "*carte blanche* for the composition of a really powerful Ministry in which there would be not the slightest suspicion of tolerance." So great was his confidence that he even went so far as to give the General to understand "in the hurly-burly such a Ministry might even come into being without him."

Thus prepared for the excitement of Necker's dismissal, having made or thinking he had made all his arrangements, sure of himself and sure of success, Mirabeau began the fight on November 6 by means of what he called a tactical evolution. The question of finance was the order of the day. He plunged into it with a vehement and skilful speech in which he called ministers to account for the scarcity of specie, the abuses of the Caisse d'Escompte, the insufficiency of the reserve of capital: he declared that the "reign of illusions was past," and, among other measures, he demanded the establishment of a central treasury intended only for the debt and under national control. After having shown the advantages of such an institution for the public credit and the creditors of the State, he asked why the nation had not the credit it deserved. He alluded to a memorandum of the ministers who, by way of self-defence, had revealed all the diseases of the State, and thus given rise to dangerous alarms. These "sad misunderstandings"

would never have been produced if the ministers had not been absent from the Assembly, and if the executive power and the legislative body, regarding each other as enemies, had not been afraid to discuss together all the affairs of the nation. Thus under cover of a technical discussion and on the occasion of a mere incident, the serious question whether a minister could belong to the National Assembly was introduced. Already on September 29 in a debate on the responsibility of ministers, Mirabeau had touched on it. His paper, the *Courrier de Provence,* had dealt with it several times in a series of remarkable articles. The time had come for its solution. Mirabeau applied himself to it with as much moderation as force, invoking the example of England, displaying the manifold advantages of an assiduous collaboration between the Assembly and ministers chosen from its midst, dismissing "frivolous fears, vain phantoms and the suspicious timidity which rushes into every trap in its dread of falling into them." Among the conclusions which he placed before the Assembly the aim of the third was to procure a decision that "his Majesty's ministers should be invited to take part in the deliberations of the Assembly until the Constitution should fix the rules to be followed with regard to them."

The motion thus presented formally assured the participation of ministers in the labours of the Assembly, and indirectly, but in the affirmative, cut across the question whether if ministers were selected from the Assembly they could continue to be members of it. There was little immediate opposition; it was supported by the Comte de Clermont-Tonnere and postponed for a day. This adjournment was enough to destroy the impression produced by Mirabeau's speech and to compromise the success of his proposal. Decisions come to in the night are not always the best. The cabal formed against Mirabeau had regained confidence and audacity. A deputy reminded him

that when there had been a discussion on a loan of thirty millions, he had asked that the debate should not be conducted in the presence of ministers. The contradiction was, perhaps, only apparent. But the Assembly fastened on it. When personal questions arise principles easily lose their authority. A young deputy, Lanjuinais, proposing the establishment of the incompatibility between the functions of a minister and the mandate of a representative, and the prohibition of the appointment to the Ministry of a deputy who has resigned his seat, was aimed directly at Mirabeau. "An eloquent genius leads and subjugates you. What would he not do if he were a minister?" From that moment "brutal, savage hatred" was let loose. Mirabeau faced it with admirable courage and address. The speech he delivered in opposition to the prohibitive motion of Blin and Lanjuinais, in its imperious and decisive brevity, displays irresistible suppleness and vigour of argument. No serious objection could be put forward against him. But in all assemblies it only too often happens that party passions and personal prejudice triumph over the clearest reason. Mirabeau found it so. His eloquence and sound sense encountered a resistance which he could not overcome. The jealousy of the triumvirate (was it on that day in his despite that he called it the *triumgueusat?*) found allies in the royalists whom the Duc de Lévis not unjustly reproached with having "ruined a project which it was to their interest to help to success." When in the face of such a coalition he felt that he had lost the game, Mirabeau said with fine irony: "Let me propose the amendment, that the suggested exclusion be confined to M. de Mirabeau, deputy for the communities of the Seneschalty of Aix."

None the less his bitterness was great. His ambition was not of a vulgar kind. He could not indeed be insensible to the brilliant rehabilitation worthy of his genius and courage, which a place in the Ministry would have

given him, nor, in his perpetual narrowness of means, to the certainty of being "saved from the claws of any dirty little creditor." More than ever he thought that "the monarchy was the only anchor of safety that could keep the country from shipwreck." But while anarchy was making such rapid progress, it was more than ever the case that there was "no one at the helm." Failing himself, and since he had, though perhaps only provisionally, been discarded, was there no other pilot to whom the navigation of the ship of the State could be entrusted in such a violent storm? He thought of the Comte de Provence.

His relations with Monsieur are still very little known. That Prince who "showed no consistency save in his perfect egoism" (Sorel), was neither liked nor respected by the King before the Revolution. But after July 14 Louis XVI, fearful of being detained in Paris and of being forced to sign a capitulation, had on the advice of Mercy, the Austrian ambassador, delivered to Monsieur the full powers of Lieutenant-General of the Kingdom. Was that evidence of absolute confidence? The spontaneity and importance of the step are much reduced when we remember that the appointment of the Comte d'Artois, leader of the counter-revolutionary party, would have been taken as an act of defiance and was, therefore, absolutely impossible.

We have seen how after the events of October, being entrusted by M. de La Marck with Mirabeau's memorandum, the carrying out of which would have needed a really firm hand, Monsieur showed a complete lack of confidence in the King's intentions and resolution. That step, however, was not without its utility to Mirabeau. On more than one occasion the Comte de Provence sent his Captain of the Guard, the Duc de Lévis, to ask his opinion on different subjects. These relations were not unknown to La Fayette, who thought he saw in them political

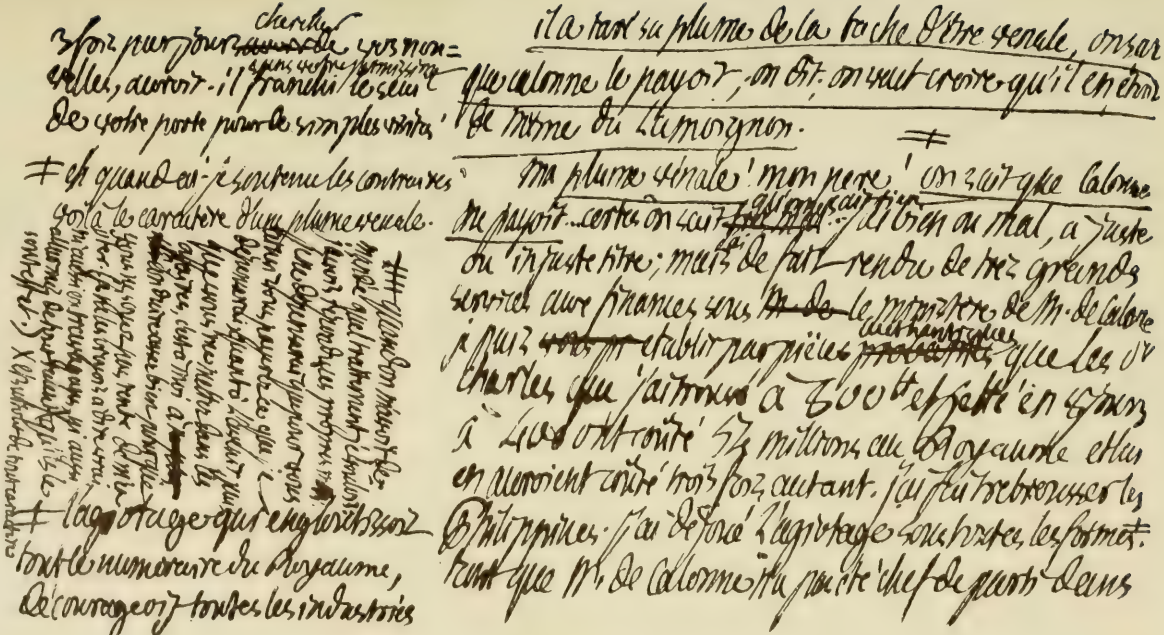
intrigues, which filled him with jealous uneasiness, while Mirabeau would only admit them to be signs of mere friendship and acquaintance. The Tribune further added with blunt frankness, through which there peeped the disappointment provoked by so many abortive endeavours: "Circumstances are very great, but men are very small, and less than ever do I see of those with whom I would care to embark."

He reproached La Fayette with his indecision, his weakness, his liking for mediocrities, the amazing attention he paid to little slanders. Against such calumny, which spared no detail of his private life, neither his love affairs nor his debts, Mirabeau rose with a dignity that I would we could more often find in him: "Believe me, Marquis, if this is their only way of stopping me, I am nowhere near the end of my career, for I am bored rather than tired, tired rather than discouraged or wounded; and if they go on denying me the right to advance, I shall make no other reply than by moving forward." He wrote to the Comte de La Marck, who had been summoned to Belgium on business, during the second fortnight in December, giving his freely pessimistic impressions of Necker's blunders, the wavering of the Assembly, which he called a "great idol," and the aggravation of the symptoms of dissolution.

With Monsieur at the Luxembourg, "they are quivering with the most intense anxiety to push forward. . . . They are afraid of being afraid." Suddenly on the night of December 24 or 25, a noble conspirator, M. de Favras, was arrested and accused of having tried to raise 30,000 men to assassinate La Fayette and Bailly, and suspected of being the agent of the Comte de Provence. Being suspected by public opinion, the Comte de Provence went to the Commune and there made a speech of protest, which he sent to the President of the Assembly, asking him to read it aloud so that "no honest citizen may

be left to the discomfort and affliction of whispered doubt." This action and the speech were inspired by Mirabeau. Their success was great enough for the Tribune to hope that Monsieur might win a "powerful ascendency and make him his Prime Minister." He drew up a memorandum, one sentence of which is characteristic: "The royal authority should be the rampart of national liberty, and national liberty the basis of the royal authority." Unfortunately an insurmountable fatality seemed to insist that "the ball should never come to the player's hands." Cajoled and tricked by the Queen, watched and disavowed by La Fayette, Monsieur weakened and his *nolonté* (Mirabeau's expression) drove him away from the Council, to which only a little energy would have taken him.

He had at least tried to bring Mirabeau nearer to the Court and to make use of his services. With this end in view he drew up a draft treaty, which he had signed by Louis XVI and Mirabeau. The text of this treaty, which is only partially given in the *Memoirs* of La Fayette, is exactly reproduced in the *History of the Reign of Louis XVI* by Droz (III, p. 97): the original is now in the possession of the Duc de Blacas. The King promised Mirabeau an ambassadorship, gave him an allowance of 50,000 livres a month, for four months at least. In exchange "M. de Mirabeau pledged himself to aid the King with his knowledge, his powers and his eloquence, in whatever Monsieur may judge to be useful for the good of the State and the interest of the King, two things which all good citizens regard as inseparable: and in any case in which M. de Mirabeau is not convinced of the solidity of the reasons which may be given to him, he shall on such subjects refrain from speaking." The exact date of this treaty, which may be approximately assigned to January 1790, is unknown. But it is certain that such a treaty was never anywhere near being carried into effect. When four months later Mirabeau allied himself with the Court,



FACSIMILE OF MIRABEAU'S HANDWRITING

(*Draft of a letter to his father from the original in the collection of M. Gabriel Lucas de Montigny*)

it was upon a very different basis and under conditions which reserved his independence of speech. In this agreement he alienated his independence to Monsieur, and put a price upon his silence. We may rejoice for the sake of his memory that such a treaty came to nothing. What turned him from it? Perhaps the unflattering idea he had of Monsieur. No doubt he was unwilling to throw in his lot with that "ball of cotton," whom all his advice and conquests and operations had not succeeded in making into a man.

His activity, which hitherto had been widening and reaching out into every sphere, now visibly slackened. More frank with La Marck than with La Fayette, he wrote on December 24: "Ah! how tired and bored I am, and how I need you to wind me up again!" But the crisis of exhaustion was not a crisis of discouragement. At the end of the year he dictated to his sister, Mme. du Saillant, a letter to his wife, who apparently wished to come back to him. It was an admirable examination of conscience, in which, in the freedom of intimate confidence, he estimated with no false modesty or excessive pride the part he had played during the previous eight months. He set down all that he had done and left undone, denied that he was a "fellow of low ambition, desiring ribbons and dignities," and declaring justly that if the perfidious impotence of the Government and the clumsy imbecility of the enemies of the Revolution had more than once led him to "pass out of his province," he had never yet deserted "his principle," and had always desired to remain or to retain to the middle way. His programme remained the same: "To revive the executive power, to regenerate the royal authority, and reconcile it with national liberty." This programme appealed to him as a fine and difficult undertaking, for which he confessed his desire to become a minister. "The decree relating to ministers must be reconsidered. They will reconsider it, or the Revolution will never be consolidated." However isolated he might be, he did not consider his

position to be as much changed as it might seem to be from a distance. He was waiting for what he called the logic of facts to bring him his opportunity, made up his mind he would one day be a minister if circumstances would have it so, or settle down to beer and skittles if he had money enough, or, if he had not enough, that he would end in "the honourable and gentle retreat" of an ambassadorship.

Thus resigned to his own destiny, he had not lost confidence in the destiny of the Revolution or the vitality of the country. He summed up the position of the monarchy in a trenchant and profound sentence contained in a letter to Major Mauvillon: "The monarchy is in danger rather from lack of government than from conspiracy." To float the vessel of the State it was necessary only to call in a sound pilot, and with and through him to overcome all human suspicions and petty jealousies. . . . "The resources of this country, the very mobility of the nation's temper, which is its chief vice, make possible so many expedients and facilities that there is never any reason in France for presumption or despair."

Less and less in his eyes did Necker appear fitted to be the "sound pilot" who could weather the storm. Certainly he was no statesman: he had no plan, no will, no system, and drifted at the mercy of events, over which he had only a hesitating, uncertain and weak control. Quite honest, a sincere Liberal, a clever banker, he was not even a good financier. Was it an entirely insoluble problem to make the "finest of kingdoms" bear the weight of the 350 to 380 millions of taxes that the situation demanded? Mirabeau did not think so. The payment of the interest on the debt and the reconstruction of the army were for him the two indispensable needs, the satisfaction of which would bring security and confidence. He declared in favour of a change in the fiscal system. Anticipating the work of the Constituent Assembly, he wished the Assembly, "in order to put an end to the barbarously con-

tradictory collections and contributions," to fix definitely the nature and quota of the tax, the assessment of which could be left to departments and districts. He demanded freedom of industry and trade. Finally, he recognized "that nothing could really take root except through a good system of public education"; and, to use his own picturesque expression, he set about "planting new men."

Finance, the army, industry and trade, public education, these were the problems to which at the outset of 1790 Mirabeau's mind was addressed. They did not, however, engross him. Would he have been a real statesman if he had not also thought of France's position abroad, her greatness and influence beyond her frontiers? He was thinking of the "banks of the Rhine," as he says in a letter to Mauvillon.

Without method the realization of such a programme was impossible. Mirabeau had a method: "We must administer," he said. "We should not be compelled to make not only general laws, but laws in detail, of which we understand and should understand nothing. The Government must be the professor, not the pupil; the master, not the slave."

When we summarize his schemes and ideas, when we measure their breadth, clarity, and the practical sense of his vast intelligence, when we feel a genius so full ready to translate its force into action, it is impossible not to see in the fatal decree of November 7 one of the most deplorable mistakes of the Constituent Assembly. On that day party hatred, jealousy, disappointed ambition and the most fatal of all parliamentary afflictions, fear, struck an irreparable blow at the Revolution and the destiny of the country.

Mirabeau did not regard the Revolution as responsible for the injustice which the "recalcitrant, stormy, and ostracising Assembly" had done him. He remained obstinately and passionately faithful to it. His friend, M. de

La Marck, railed against the Revolution, and was amazed at its aberrations: no doubt because he had never really understood it. Attached to the Court, the confidant and friend of the Queen, the distinguished nobleman was more interested in the monarchy than in the Revolution, while Mirabeau regarded the monarchy above all as the condition and guarantee of the Revolution. This divergence is enough to account for M. de La Marck reproaching the mighty orator with certain speeches and actions as mistakes in conduct though, in spite of appearances and the violence of the language, they show nothing save the constancy of his opinions.

Was not Mirabeau true to himself at the sitting of January 9, 1790, when he took so lofty a tone with the Parlement of Rennes, which had refused to register and execute the decrees of the National Assembly? A few days later, in the letter he dictated to his sister, he said that destruction was still necessary. "The royal authority will never really coalesce with the people as long as the Parlements exist. They preserve for it and the nobility the fatal and illusive hope of re-establishing the old order of things." The Parlements of Rennes, Rouen, Metz, Bordeaux and Toulouse had by their resistance justified this prediction. Called to the bar of the Assembly, the President of the *Chambre des Vacations* at Rennes, instead of justifying himself and bowing to authority, had been so bold as to invoke the rights of Brittany. To such "criminal lunacy," which, if it were tolerated, would have meant the "annihilation of the Revolution and the signal for anarchy throughout the Empire," Mirabeau's vengeful eloquence responded with a declaration of the national sovereignty, the indivisibility of the kingdom, the rights of France. "Are you Bretons? The French command you. Are you only nobles of Brittany? The Bretons are your masters; yes, the Bretons, the men, the Commons, what you call the Third Estate."

When upon several occasions he intervened in the debates occasioned by the disturbances at Marseilles, to which, on January 26, he devoted his longest speech, Mirabeau recalled how he had been sent by that turbulent city to the States-General. But, as a revolutionary and a patriot, he felt on the one hand that "the counter-revolution was there," and that, on the other, it was a question of "enslaving and for ever liberating Provence." These debates were the occasion and provocation of extremely violent scenes between himself and the Abbé Maury. The Right seemed to be seeking its revenge. Mirabeau was its chief adversary and opposed its designs. He did not believe in the return to despotism, but, though he had not altogether ceased to dread counter-revolution by force, he was apprehensive of what he called "negotiation," that is to say, the organized incitement of the big towns, and their irritation and impatience, skilfully fomented and fed. He thought of the inhabitants of the country districts, who "understand nothing of our philosophy, for whom our love of liberty, whatever it may be, cannot for a long time be anything but a hot fit of fever, without whom we cannot consolidate the Revolution; who will take no interest in it, but very much the reverse, if they do not find in it immediate and considerable relief for themselves." His perspicacity was alarmed by the news coming in from the provinces: "War over the elections, war against smugglers, war against taxes, religious war—there is the germ of all these in twenty cantons of the kingdom."

But he would not, under pretext of reinforcing the executive power with provisional powers, furnish it with instruments which might put dangerous obstacles in the way of the accomplishment of the Revolution. And he therefore vigorously opposed the proposal of Cazalès to invest the King for three months with unlimited executive power.

On April 19 he frustrated a move on the part of the Right, who, on the pretext that certain of its mandates were

limited, demanded the dissolution of the Assembly. Boldly and broadly he called to mind the heroic sittings, the dangers averted, the services rendered, the work done by the Assembly, and he ended this magnificent improvisation with the famous phrase which electrified and entranced the whole Assembly: "I swear that you have saved the commonwealth!"

On May 3 a discussion on the municipal organization of Paris brought Mirabeau to grips with Robespierre. The deputy for Arras, whose reputation was beginning to be built up on a few happy speeches, though no one could have foretold his extraordinary destiny, demanded the preservation of the sixty districts which had been created at the beginning of the Revolution to meet the circumstances. Mirabeau saw the danger. He did not hesitate to describe as "monstrous" in a democracy the existence of these primary assemblies which were maintained with "a zeal that was more patriotic than prudent." There are two sentences worth quoting from this significant utterance. "To ask for the permanence of the districts is to try to establish sixty sovereign sections in one great body wherein they cannot help producing an effect of action and reaction which might well destroy our Constitution." This was his judgment and condemnation of the system. "Let us not mistake the heated fervour of principles for the sublimity of principles." It was also his judgment of the man. We know what became of both system and man under the Convention. Mirabeau, whose prophetic gaze had discerned the disease, was the only man who could have been strong enough to deal with it.

His desire for law and order, his inflexible determination to save the Revolution by delivering it from anarchy, did not protect him from the suspicions and imputations of the moderate party in the Assembly. Fresh disturbances, which had led to bloodshed, had broken out at Marseilles. The National Guard had taken possession of certain forts.

The King had demanded their evacuation and restitution by the municipality to the proper authority. Mirabeau approved these measures. But he asked that nothing further should be done until information had been gathered which might give evidence of plans and plots against liberty. With pitiless logic he added: "Why should it be culpable in Marseilles on April 30 and not culpable here on October 5?" The outcry of the Right and vague insinuations combined to represent the Tribune as the instigator of these disorders. He haughtily spurned the slanders "of men who," he said, "would have condemned me to the silence of contempt if it were a question only of men of their stamp. . . . Their poisoned tongues have never for a moment led me to swerve from true principles." Was it an allusion, not understood by his auditors, and intended for other ears, to the secret negotiations which had been in train for several weeks with the object of preparing an understanding between Mirabeau and the Court? They open a new phase in his troubled life, a phase in which his public action became twofold, and was complicated by a secret activity. Never was the greatness of his genius better affirmed and developed, but, alas! never was it to be relieved from the heavy price of that sad servitude which he was doomed by his destiny to carry always and everywhere with him.

## CHAPTER XIV

### RELATIONS WITH THE COURT

The Court treats with Mirabeau—Discussion on the Right of War and Peace—Interview with the Queen—Mirabeau's foreign policy—The tricolour—Understanding with M. Montmorin: Mirabeau's plan.

On February 4, 1790, Louis XVI unexpectedly visited the National Assembly. He came to declare his acquiescence in the new decrees relating to general administration. But his speech contained more than acquiescence. It was an act of faith in constitutional liberty, and a promise to support the new order of things against each and every attempt that might be made to upset it. The firmly loyal tone of this spontaneous declaration produced a great impression both in and out of the Assembly. Mirabeau was almost alone in standing outside the general enthusiasm, and he denounced "this pantomime" to M. de La Marck. The King's speech seemed strange to him. As he said, "he could not unhappily help his ears discerning" a certain lack of good faith which seemed to him ominous for the future. His distrust could only have been aroused by the passage in the King's speech in which the King rather naïvely, it must be admitted, appealed to the wisdom and "candour" of the Assembly to strengthen the executive power. But was not that precisely the dominant idea of Mirabeau's policy? When Louis XVI said that without this condition there could be no lasting order at home, no consideration abroad, was he not taking his text from Mirabeau? There must have been something else at the bottom of Mirabeau's annoyance. The *Courrier de Provence* revealed the real cause of it. He taxed the

ministers with having screened their responsibility behind the infallibility of the King. In other words, Mirabeau understood that the speech was a move on the part of Necker and La Fayette. He was not wrong. The Swedish ambassador, the son-in-law of the Minister of Finance, admits as much in a private letter to his sovereign: "Monsieur, who had tried to enter into an intrigue with M. de Mirabeau to gain admission to the Council and make himself leader of the popular party," he wrote, "has been cleverly frustrated. M. Necker and M. de La Fayette are therefore to be regarded as the two main powers in the Government."

So, once again, Mirabeau was in a position to gauge the influence of La Fayette. Being powerless to move against or without him, he tried to approach the General. His own personal position was still assailed by those "subaltern" difficulties which were overwhelming and hampering him. Deprived of resources and the means of action, beset with immediate personal anxiety, he was alarmed by the trend of public events. Irresistibly authority was weakening in face of the menace of anarchy. Under pretext of the public danger he disregarded the "amiable Conventions which bind men together or thrust them apart," and on April 18 he addressed a long letter to La Fayette. It is a fine production, adroit, powerful, firm and yet deferential. The misfortunes of the State are described with force and restraint. How are they to be cured? Mirabeau sees in La Fayette a point round which to rally and reunite "opinion through men, since men can only be held together through opinion." He offers to form a compact and indissoluble political alliance with him in which he will associate himself with the popularity on which the General's power was based, and to pool with it "his talent, his resources and his courage." But that Mirabeau may have his fair share of the glory, he must be rid of the "cankers" which were poisoning his life and

made it more difficult for him than for any other man to win the popular favour. He asks, therefore, to be released from the impediments which the "long-continued errors of his private life" had imposed on him to his continual mortification. On the other hand, having discovered in Constantinople a new source of influence which might subserve the interests of France, he begs for the renewal of the King's old promise of an important embassy. It is not often, says Mirabeau, that such confidences are made in writing. But he wished to give La Fayette a proof of his trust in him, and to give him a document which would prove his treachery if he were ever to violate the laws of the suggested political union.

La Fayette only saw in this letter "a clever trick to ensnare his delicacy." It is to be regretted, but hardly to be wondered at. Washington had well hit off the character of his old comrade in arms when he wrote: "All your worries come from an unusual sensibility when your reputation is in question." Mirabeau's stormy youth, his debts, the scandals associated with his name, his impetuous familiarity, shocked La Fayette's sensibility and alarmed his feeling for his reputation. Raised by extraordinary circumstances to a unique position, which was out of proportion to his merits and his services, La Fayette believed himself to be equal to his destiny. He could not see how Mirabeau's support could be useful to him. "I neither like, nor esteem, nor fear the man," he said. As a matter of fact he was less afraid of his antagonism than of his collaboration. He felt that in Mirabeau's bold and mighty hands his own glory would only be an instrument. Wishing neither to compromise himself nor to suffer extinction, he refused an alliance of which he perceived the dangers more clearly than the advantages. In his line of thought he was concerned only with himself. If he had considered the public interest, must he not have thought otherwise?

The Court was in a state of hesitation, ill-informed, ill-

protected against the many dangers which threatened it, and could not make up its mind to any definite step, or to choose for its direction and protection an energetic influence in which it could repose confidence and gain and give support. Necker, admittedly, had failed. But the King was warned and terrified by an experiment which had provoked the 14th July, and dared not dismiss him. He had asked La Fayette to explain his ideas of the royal prerogative. Action having become impossible, the time was filled up with consultations.

For some weeks past the "painful extremity" of turning to Mirabeau had been accepted. M. de La Marck was away. The Austrian ambassador, de Mercy-Argenteau, sent for him. He told him that the King and Queen had determined to seek the services of his friend, and counted on him to act as intermediary and to sound the Tribune. M. de La Marck was under no great illusion as to the effects to be looked for from such tardy intervention, but undertook to carry on the negotiations only on condition that the ambassador would take part in them. He arranged an interview at his own house between Mirabeau, to whom he did not immediately tell the truth, and Comte de Mercy. The conversation was frank and cordial, and was concerned only with the general situation. Mirabeau declared that there could be no improvement until the King consented to leave, not France, but Paris. It was the idea he had expressed in November in the memorandum read by the Comte de Provence. After these preliminary *pourparlers*, of the real significance of which Mirabeau was left in ignorance, M. de La Marck saw the King and Queen. Marie Antoinette, who was still filled with horror at the recollection of the events of October, wished to be reassured as to Mirabeau's attitude. There was no one in a better position than La Marck to deny his friend's participation in those events. The King declared that the negotiations should go on without reference to his

ministers and no objection could make him change his mind. M. de La Marck was appalled by such dangerous obstinacy, seeing how infallibly it must lead to conflict, and he informed Mirabeau of the royal project. Mirabeau embraced it with enthusiasm, as though his own and the kingdom's destiny had been changed thereby. In accordance with his promise to the King, M. de La Marck asked him to state his ideas on the situation in writing.

Mirabeau's first note dated May 10, 1790, gave Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette a satisfaction which they did not attempt to conceal and expressed emphatically. The Queen questioned M. de La Marck as to the best course to take to win Mirabeau's approval of herself and the King. M. de La Marck and M. de Mercy were of the opinion that the first thing to be done was to pay the Tribune's debts. Mirabeau drew up a list of them, the sum-total being 208,000 francs, and they went back so far as to include the price of his wedding clothes! He could not believe that such an enormous sum would be forthcoming, and he asked for a guarantee of 100 louis a month. When the King next saw M. de La Marck he gave him back the original of the letter, and told him what a good impression it had made on him: "Please keep it," he added, "together with these four notes on my credit, of 250,000 livres each. If, as he promises, M. de Mirabeau serves me well, you must send him these notes at the end of the session of the National Assembly, and he will receive a million. In the meanwhile I will see that his debts are paid, and I will leave it to you to decide on the amount necessary for him to have every month as a provision against his immediate difficulties." The Comte de La Marck suggested 6000 livres; the King made no objection. M. de Fontanges, Archbishop of Toulouse, a *protégé* of the Queen, who had absolute confidence in him, was charged with the liquidation of Mirabeau's debts.

When he heard the news Mirabeau was "wild with joy," drunk with it; and so beside himself as to astonish even M. de La Marck. Upon reflection M. de La Marck was disposed to excuse his transports by attributing them to Mirabeau's new-found satisfaction in finding an issue from his adventurous existence, and to his pride in thinking that he was at last being reckoned with. Being freed of the burden of his past, he was in a position if not, in the terms of his employment, to give his true measure, at least to devote himself usefully to the service of his country.

Mirabeau's indiscreet and unconscionable delight adds to the inevitable sadness which any impartial critic must feel on thinking of the terms of such a contract. We need not, it is true, condemn in principle his relations with the Court. They cast no stain upon the political probity or the private morality of the great orator. He was a monarchist not only by tradition and principle, but because he could not conceive of the maintenance and development of the revolutionary conquests, in which he had played so large a part, except under the safeguard and in the setting of royalty. At the end of May 1789, a month after the opening of the States-General, foreseeing the gathering storm, he said to Malouet: "We cannot but wonder whether monarchy and monarch will survive the brewing tempest, or whether mistakes already committed and mistakes that cannot fail to be committed will not engulf us all." Unswervingly, obstinately, with a clear-sightedness and a fidelity which had never for a moment wavered, he had set himself, in his speeches and writings, in his deeds and in his words, to reconcile the rights of King and people, the guarantees of royalty with those of liberty. The progress of anarchy, seconded by the weakness of an irresolute and maladroit Ministry, had made him feel with increasing force the necessity of restoring to the royal power, which had been left to itself in the midst of a tragic crisis, its natural initiative and its legitimate

prerogative. Irritated as he was by the counsellors who had neither plan nor aim, neither programme nor method, could he refuse to give the advice asked of him, when, four months before the opening of the States-General, he had proposed a Constitution to save the kingdom from the plotting of the aristocracy and the excesses of the democracy? To refuse would have seemed to him an act of desertion, and Mirabeau was not the kind of man to desert his cause. He would indeed have preferred public action, open fight, to carry the assault into the Assembly, to defy danger and assume responsibility in the full light of day, to live amid the clash of discussion and the reverberations of the national tribune. Jealousy and fear had withheld this opportunity from his genius. He did not despair of a return of fortune. Meanwhile, perhaps by way of preparing that return, he consented to give advice secretly, and resigned himself to the anonymous and irresponsible, though none the less dangerous, control which the overtures of the Court offered him. Already La Fayette, whose tendencies were republican, had played a similar part. And later on such a part was to prove not at all distasteful either to the uncompromising severity of a man like Lameth, concerned for the safety of the kingdom, or to the generosity of Barnave moved by the spectacle of horrible misfortunes.

The wrong and, not to shrink from using the correct word, the disgraceful part of it is to be sought elsewhere. When Lucas de Montigny speaks in his *Memoirs* of "the vague and doubtful question of money, which after all is quite secondary, or even, in so serious a case, negligible," his is the action of a respectful son casting a cloak over his father's error. History has other rights, other duties. The admiration we may feel for Mirabeau's genius, the extraordinary, irresistible quality of his intellectual power and kindness of heart, even the pity we cannot but find for so much unhappiness, should not stand in the way of a judgment which must be severe.

It might conceivably be possible to excuse, though not to justify, the payment of the debts and the monthly allowance. M. de Loménie was not wrong in saying that "there was no contravention of honour according to the ideas of the *ancien régime,* and in the case of a gentleman in distress, in having his debts paid and his necessities provided for by the King." Threatened by his creditors, whose importunities were likely to be turned to the service of party interest and hatred, Mirabeau was, indeed, only too vulnerable. "Why should my enemies not be robbed of every pretext against me," he wrote to La Fayette in April, "and I be restored, not for my own sake, but for the sake of my country now in danger, to the possession of my true power? It is only to that end that I wish my debts to be paid." Men of unimpeachable reputation like La Marck and Mercy had spontaneously come to this idea, the realization of which, when entrusted to his care, had in no way shocked the scruples of the worthy Archbishop of Toulouse. In order freely to employ Mirabeau and to help him to give of his best, it was necessary to release him from the cares with which the follies of his youth had burdened his maturity. But was it not also necessary, since his time, his activity, his pen, and part of his life, were being taken, to "assure the independence of his talents and character," so that he might give more "development and force" to his opinion? In his justification of Mirabeau's having received a monthly allowance from the King, M. de La Marck, a royalist nobleman, anticipated the judgment of the revolutionary Proudhon: "If we consider Mirabeau only as a consulting lawyer, whose talent, days, nights, secretaries, whose life and courage are engaged and occupied, we should grant him the right to a legitimate reward." It must be added, to complete the facts, that Mirabeau was conducting an important correspondence with the provinces through numerous agents. And I am quite ready to admit that all these considerations

do up to a certain point make it possible to excuse him for having received 6000 livres a month, a remuneration for his trouble and expense in giving his services.

But I confess that I cannot say as much for the promised million which historians on both sides have generally considered with the rest. Do not the notes signed by the King and entrusted to M. de La Marck and made conditional on effective service, form, whatever we may like to say, the unjustifiable and immoral element of the secret contract which bound Mirabeau to the Court? Proudhon does not recoil from the idea that the Revolution should have voted a pension for Mirabeau to assure him rest and security in return for his services. I fail to see how such a pension could have harmonized with the terrible speech on bankruptcy. But at least it is impossible to confuse a national reward of that kind, openly voted, with a secret, uncertain and prospective reward which depended upon the value attached by the King to service given. Mirabeau had delivered himself up to the mercies of Louis XVI, who while he was "paying him very dearly," used to speak of him contemptuously as of a "person undeserving of esteem." Such a judgment is painfully humiliating, because it is impossible not to feel that it was deserved, and, though we cannot refuse the great and unhappy Tribune the human pity, of which, in spite of everything, he remains worthy, conscience and history, like Michelet, answer the question: "Was there corruption?" with a sorrowful and uncompromising "Yes."

"When that has been said, let us turn away and fix our attention on the reality of things, on the loftiness of the man's aim and ideas" (Sainte-Beuve). For, if there was corruption, there was no treachery. On that point, happily, all the evidence, even the most partial, is unanimous. M. de La Marck's declaration, heavily underlined: "No, Mirabeau never sacrificed his principles to his pecuniary interests; he received money from the King, but it

was in order to save the King," might, as coming from a friend, be subject to caution. But is it possible to doubt the opinion of La Fayette, whose hostile feelings are well known, or that of Necker's daughter, Mme. de Staël? La Fayette said: "Mirabeau would not for any sum have supported an opinion destructive of liberty or dishonourable to his mind." Mme. de Staël rather differently, but no less categorically, said: "Whether Mirabeau did or did not accept money from the Court, he was determined to be the master and not the instrument of that Court."

Now let us see him at work. We know the intermediaries between him and the Court: the Comte de La Marck received his notes, gave them to M. de Fontanges, who transmitted them to the Queen, who had entrusted him with "her every thought, her every word, her every deed."

Last of all came the King and the place is only too well in keeping with the character of the unhappy Louis XVI. Thought, decision, action must be undertaken for him. But he was so slippery that there was never any certainty that he would not escape. The loyalty of his intentions was always betrayed by the weakness of his character. The judgment passed by one of his brothers and his wife on his irresolute nature is that of history. After the events of October, the Comte de Provence made this famous remark to M. de La Marck: "The King's indecision passes all telling. To give you an idea of his character, imagine yourself with two oiled ivory balls and trying to keep them together." In August 1791 Marie Antoinette wrote to M. de Mercy: "You know the kind of man with whom I have to deal. Just when you think you have convinced him, a word, an argument will make him change without his having any idea of it: it is for that reason that there are thousands of things which we simply cannot attempt."

Only the Queen had any influence over this weak, un-

decided ruler. At the beginning of his reign he said: "I have read a little history and I know that this State has always been ruined by women—legitimate and illicit." This was only too true, and there was a tragic prophecy in the words. Louis XVI's virtue kept predatory women at a distance: his timidity delivered him up to his wife. The miserable Calvary which led Marie Antoinette to death, her dignity in her prison, the pride which upheld her in the face of infamous accusations, her heroism on the scaffold cannot avert the judgment of history to which as a Queen she belongs. M. de Ségur in his impartial and attractive book, *Au couchant de la monarchie,* has said with much force: "Truth as well as pity has its rights." Truth has served Marie Antoinette's memory by justifying her against ignoble suspicions which, alas! came too often from the Court which had encouraged, to the swelling of so many filthy libels, her natural coquetry, her taste for pleasure, and especially the indiscretions and dissipations into which she was drawn by a deplorable set of courtiers. But there is no reason why a sort of chivalrous magnanimity should deprive posterity of its rights. To deny Marie Antoinette's share in politics is to deny the evidence. Hating Turgot, Malesherbes, Necker (after his recall), before and at the beginning of the Revolution, she served the interests, the passions and the spite of a coterie whose influence was justified by neither their past, their talents, nor their services. The events of October 5 and 6 had shown with bloody violence the contemptuous hostility and the passionate indignation of which she was the object. She had faced the mob with a firmness which showed her to be a true daughter of Maria Theresa. But did she understand the lesson of the terrible events that had been unfolded before her eyes? In the Hôtel de Ville she had with happy tact pronounced the word "confidence" which had brought many over to her side. Since that time Mirabeau believed that she had

abandoned her interest in public affairs. "The Queen," he wrote on December 23, "remains in retirement: *I do not interfere*." He undoubtedly never expected her to issue from her retirement to appeal to him.

An attempt had been made to compromise her in the Favras affair by fresh proceedings in the matter of the necklace. By guiding and saving the Comte de Provence Mirabeau had indirectly extricated her from her quandary. She could not evidently be grateful to him for an intervention which implied no sort of service. But perhaps she appreciated the access of power given to the orator whose irresistible force and whose skill in winding and unwinding the most tangled intrigues she had felt to her detriment. When she resigned herself to making an appeal for his advice, she was still afraid of him. But, unstable, inconsequent, incapable of any sustained thought as she was, she fell, at any rate at the beginning, into the contrary excess. The hopes she had built up on Mirabeau's services hid from her the danger of her situation. M. de La Marck was struck by the Queen's careless gaiety, her amiable and gracious humour, the ease with which she escaped from the terrifying realities of the present into recollections of the happy past. In the letter of August 16, 1791, of which I have already quoted a passage, she spoke of news "so wild and absurd that it could only have emanated from a French brain." Was she really so absorbed in thought or so firm in project that she could pass so severe a judgment on the country of which she was Queen? Had not Prince Xavier de Saxe cast the same reproach at her? "She is very light-headed," he said, "and absolutely Austrian." She remained light-headed, even to the tragic hours which raised her courage so high. And she did not cease to be an Austrian. Unhappy was this woman, abandoned and a stranger in a strange land, whose destiny did but tardily reveal to her her duty in prison and at the price of death!

The letter that Mirabeau, still ignorant of the conditions under which he was to lend his support, wrote on May 10, 1790, to King Louis XVI, is a profession of faith, noble, generous and firm, which dominates, explains and prepares his action. Being vowed, he says, to the silence of contempt, he only abandons his project of retirement to attempt to save the kingdom from anarchy and to contribute to "something other than a vast demolition." In his first words he declares that "the re-establishment of the legitimate authority of the King is the first need of France, and the only means of saving the country." He wishes to put the executive power in its right place, in the Constitution and in the hands of the King, in order to bring the whole public force of the country to bear on securing respect for the law. But, if he deplores the excesses into which the Revolution had drifted, he twice affirms his horror of a counter-revolution, which he avers to be at once "dangerous and criminal." Guided by these principles, he agrees to give his written opinion on events in order to direct, to forestall, or to repair them. Without guaranteeing success, which can never depend upon one man, he promises everything in his power—his loyalty, his zeal, his activity, his energy, and "a courage which perhaps is not thoroughly estimated." Knowing the extent of his pledge and his desire, he asks that his writings may be placed in safe keeping, for, he says with a pride in which there is already something of his promised courage, "they will remain for ever my condemnation or my justification."

Circumstances at once played into his hands. M. de Montmorin had on May 14 approached the National Assembly with a demand for subsidies with which to arm fourteen ships of the line against the preparations being made by England. Alexandre de Lameth made use of the incident to raise the question to whom belonged the right of war and peace—the nation or the King? Before allowing the opening of a full-dress theoretical debate

which was to occupy many sittings, Mirabeau's political mind began to work at high pressure. Having gained the admission that the right of armaments and the right to take immediate steps would always belong to the supreme executive of the national will, he procured a vote of thanks to the King for having taken the necessary precautions for the maintenance of peace.

The discussion brought into conflict two absolute and extreme tendencies. Those on the Right wished to give the King the sole right of war and peace; those on the extreme Left claimed to reserve the exercise of that right to the Assembly. In his first speech on May 20 Mirabeau took up a position between the two contentions in favour of a system which would give each of the two powers a share, and would allow for action and purpose, execution and deliberation. He stated as a principle that the right to make war or peace belonged to the nation. Then he delegated the exercise of that right concurrently to the legislative and to the executive power. His scheme gave the King the duty of watching over the external safety of the kingdom, of maintaining good relations and conducting negotiations abroad, of making preparations for war, of distributing the land and sea forces, and, in case of actual hostilities, of directing them. In the case of imminent hostilities or an actual outbreak, or of having to support an ally, or of being forced to confirm a right by force of arms, the King was to advise or to convoke the legislative body and ask it for the necessary supplies. Thus informed the Assembly could approve or disapprove of the war, and in case of disapproval could censure the King's Ministers and refuse the money. At any point the legislative body could require the executive power to negotiate for peace. The scheme reserved to the executive the right to call out the National Guard if the King were to wage war in person. Precautions were taken to ensure the disbandment of the troops after the conclusion

of peace. Finally, the King was accorded the right to sign treaties of peace, alliance, or commerce with foreign Powers so long as they did not take effect without the ratification of the legislative body.

The eleven articles of Mirabeau's scheme, drawn up, with his approval, by Le Chapelier, after a series of brilliant and stormy debates, gained the almost unanimous assent of the Assembly. They laid down the essential principles which have passed into every subsequent constitution. Mirabeau brought to the service of his thesis an altogether exceptional force of argument. His desire to placate public opinion, which was ill-instructed and excited by intrigue, constrained the use of certain awkward or obscure expressions. But the whole thing is admirably clear and logical. Truth shines through it with irresistible compelling power, and fortifies the essential and permanent principles of government against the sophistry of party.

No doubt Mirabeau proclaims that "the French nation renounces all idea of conquest, and will never use its power against the liberty of any people." But he had too much practical good sense to believe in the establishment of perpetual peace through the percolation of such disinterestedness, and to leave France unarmed against Europe in arms: "Shall we ever be so fortunate as suddenly to see the miracle to which we owe our liberty repeated brilliantly in the two hemispheres?" Against the exclusive right to make war delegated to an assembly of a thousand men he has urgent objections expressed in the happiest form: "While one member may be proposing deliberation, the war may be demanded by the public with no uncertain voice. You will see yourselves surrounded with an army of citizens. You wish to avoid being deceived by Ministers: will you never deceive yourselves?" History, which he had studied, gives ample support to his contention. Have not the free nations always been distinguished by the most barbarous and ambitious wars? Has it not

always been under the "spell of passion" that political assemblies have declared war? "We must not import republican forms into a government which is both representative and monarchical."

With such words Mirabeau transcended the debate, generalized the discussion, raised the particular question to the level of a constitutional problem. He warned the Assembly against the danger of "projecting the alarms of the moment into the future," of exaggerating fear to the point of making the cure worse than the evil, of dividing the citizens of the country into two parties always ready to conspire against each other, instead of uniting them in the cause of liberty. He attached their inalienable value to the legitimate rights of the executive power and of the monarch: "See to it," he says, "that the King has nothing to regret but what the law cannot allow, and do not fear, lest a rebel King, himself abdicating his throne, should run the risk of being hurried from victory to the scaffold." The Right murmured, and d'Espremesnil protested in the name of the inviolability of the royal person. Unperturbed, Mirabeau dismissed the accusation of bad faith. "You have all understood," he said, "my supposition of a deposed king in revolt coming with an army of Frenchmen to conquer a position of tyranny: such a king, in such a case, is no longer a king."

This ardent, luminous, passionate and wise speech, in which the feeling for reality skilfully frustrates sophistry and victoriously destroys chimerical visions, was answered by Barnave. Uplifted by the greatness of the debate, by emulation, by the passions of the people, swept out of himself, he made a profound impression. His system, which sees in the King the supreme depositary of the executive power, reserves the right to declare war and peace exclusively to the legislative body. The Assembly, moved less by the arguments than by its fear of giving a King in whom it had no trust the means of crushing by

means of war the liberties which had been conquered with so much difficulty, wished to put it to the vote. Mirabeau scented danger: "Either," he said, "M. Barnave's friends believe that his speech will triumph over every reply to it, or they do not believe it. If they believe it, it seems to me reasonable to expect them in the generosity of their admiration not to dread a reply, and that they will give us leave to make a reply; if they do not believe it, it is their duty to seek further information." The Opposition yielded grudgingly. Mirabeau was given the right to reply.

Only a short while before he had declared himself to be "crushed by the weight of work beyond his power." That was the orator's coquetry. Now in the tribune he was more supple, more powerful, more eloquent than ever. His self-possession was disturbed neither by the popular excitement which had brought a crowd of fifty thousand men to the hall, nor by the plots and intrigues of his enemies, nor by Fréron's threats, nor by the violence and frenzy of the pamphlets distributed at the door, nor by the fierce antagonism of the hostile tribunes, nor by the fevered turmoil of an assembly still warm from the triumph it had given Barnave. With his very first words, with absolute self-mastery, with weighty deliberateness, calm and dignified, as though he were not staking his whole genius, perhaps his very existence, he set aside all passion, hatred, the irascibility of wounded vanity: "It would seem," he declared, "that it is impossible, without committing a crime, to have two opinions on one of the most delicate and difficult questions of social organization!" Then, suddenly, with a swift allusion to the popular suspicions, to Barnave's success, to the vengeance with which he had himself been threatened, he changed his tone, and compelled the attention of the Assembly, which his self-possession, absolutely dominating the tumult, had reduced to silence: "I also, a few days ago, came near to being

borne in triumph! And now they cry in the streets: *The High Treason of the Comte de Mirabeau.*" It is impossible to summarize what follows. If there is in the whole of French oratory a passage which, for loftiness of tone, nobility of inspiration, restrained force of indignation and scorn, for largeness of movement and marvellous choice of words, is to be set against the oratory of the ancients, none other could be chosen, for none could be found in which there is such a perfect blend of lasting humanity and actual tingling life.

This magnificent exordium overshadows the whole of the rest of the speech, the precision and dialectic of which deserve almost equal admiration. Mirabeau had been reproached with having taken refuge in subtleties. He endeavours to reply with a directness great enough to enable him to say to Barnave: "If it rests with me, this day will lay bare the secret of our respective loyalties." The structure of his eloquent opponent's argument rested on a sophism, which confused the legislative body with the legislative power. The legislative body resided in the Assembly, but the legislative power belonged both to the Assembly, which deliberated and voted, and to the King, who ratified and acted. To attribute the right of war and peace solely to the legislative body, was, in the most terrible crisis, to suppress an organ which, in ordinary legislation, in the name of the Constitution, exercised rights which were formally acknowledged. Must we, because monarchy has its dangers, renounce its advantages, and because fire burns, deprive ourselves of the warmth and light that we get from it? "Everything can stand except inconsequence: let us say that we do not need a King: let us not say that we only need an impotent and useless King." In order to show that governments sometimes try to evade their responsibilities by making war, Barnave had cited the example of Pericles, who, when he was unable to meet his liabilities, began the Peloponnesian

war. Was he a king or a despotic minister? "Pericles was a man who, having the art to flatter popular passion, and to secure applause as he left the tribune, by his own or his friends' munificence, forced into the Peloponnesian war—whom? The National Assembly of Athens." The National Assembly of France felt the sting of this shaft.

One by one Mirabeau then took the articles of his scheme, dissected them, justified them, and ended with a nobly generous peroration in which, calling to mind his services, he set them against the virulent libels then current, "the yelping of envious mediocrity." It was a triumph!

Scornful though he was of insult and calumny, he could not remain insensible to the atrocious campaign in which his adversaries (Barnave must be excepted) tried to diminish the effect of his success. Victorious in the Assembly, he tried to bring the question before the country. It is to be regretted that in order to cover up certain small concessions which the discussion had induced him to make, he made modifications in his first speech which party hatred endeavoured to turn to profit. But the letter which he addressed to the departments remains an unforgettable testimony of the determined frankness with which he affirmed the necessity of "passing from a state of legitimate insurrection to the lasting peace of a real social state." It was the language of a statesman. In one of his speeches he had not been afraid to say that "wisdom dwells not in extremes," and that the desire to destroy should not impede the desire to reconstruct. It is clear that he did not reserve the expression of his ideas for the King alone in the form of secret advice. He addressed sovereign and people in the same energetic language to their common edification and profit.

On this question of the right of war and peace La Fayette had voted with Mirabeau. With some political sagacity the King tried to bring them together. This desire led Mirabeau on June 1 to approach the General once more.

But the tone of his letter gave indications of the change that had come over the situation. Side by side with incontrovertible truths were passages which in their irreverent irony could not but exasperate and irritate La Fayette's susceptibilities. When Mirabeau said to him: "Your great qualities need my impulse; my impulse needs your great qualities," he was speaking and seeing with indisputable exactitude. He was no less right in declaring that decision was the first need and the only means of salvation. But he lacked tact or prudence, just though the reproach might be, in reminding the General of "the small men who, for small considerations and by petty manœuvres, short-sightedly" were trying to alienate them. La Fayette thought the proposal calculated in tone "to join them on a footing very different from that of their previous acquaintance." He withdrew. Mirabeau was offering to be his Père Joseph, but, after all, would he go on for long being satisfied with a merely shadowy eminence, and was he not led by his ambition, which was thoroughly justified by his genius, to hope to play the part of Richelieu to a new Louis XIII? Besides, he had so little faith in the result of his advances, that, on the very day when he made them, he devoted almost the whole of his first note to the Court to a demonstration of the necessity of weakening La Fayette's authority. He has been accused of duplicity. That is going too far. There is a lack of kindliness in his portrait of La Fayette, which is rather overdrawn. But there is a good deal of truth in what he says about that "irresponsible Minister" who was obeyed by responsible Ministers. The position that circumstances had given La Fayette was false, uncertain and dangerous. Though he was incapable of facing the dangers and assuming the duties of government, he could not easily bring himself to allow others to play the part for which he was unfitted. From this point of view Mirabeau was not wrong in taxing him with his pliability and weakness: "In the frightful

storm which is about to break over us, let him choose skilful pilots, capable of saving us from shipwreck, and I will say nothing, or rather I will applaud him." The occasion for such applause never came.

Almost all Mirabeau's notes to the Court at this early period return insistently to the same point. He is always denouncing, especially on the eve of the Federation, La Fayette's "ambitious incapacity," his intention of having himself appointed General, and his designs on the dictatorship. His attacks gain in poignancy from the fact that his genuine anxiety for the public safety was mingled with the bitterness of personal spite. Mirabeau foresaw the brilliancy of the celebrations with which the Federation festivities would be attended, and he desired to figure in them as President of the Assembly. The choice lay with La Fayette, who, desiring a "virtuous patriot," rejected Mirabeau. Such cruel words are not easily forgiven.

In his very first note Mirabeau spoke of the decree which forbade deputies to be Ministers, and of the necessity for rescinding it. Meanwhile he would have liked to have a faithful man on the Council who should "watch the current of events and give methodical advice." The King did not understand.

At the outset of his relations with the Court, Mirabeau had defined his attitude in one sentence: "I shall be what I have always been: the defender of the monarchical power regulated by the laws, and the apostle of liberty guaranteed by the monarchical power." The note of July 3, his eighth, strongly accentuated his position, re-established a comparison between the royal authority as it was under the *ancien régime* and what it had become since the summoning of the States-General. Under the old order the King had no absolute power, since he had to accommodate the nobility, the clergy, the parlements and the Court. His authority was "incomplete, because it had no legal foundation; insufficient, because it relied more on public

power than on public opinion; uncertain, because a revolution, such as might break out at any moment, could overthrow it." The Constitution gives the King powers which are certainly insufficient, but are at any rate preferable to such precariousness. It liberates him from the subjection which for centuries had weighed on the monarchy: "Is it nothing to be without parlements, without States, without clergy, privilege, nobility?" The essential is to administer. "To administer is to govern; to govern is to reign; that is the whole thing in little." The Assembly had usurped that power: it must be taken from it. Thus the King was interested in the Constitution which procured him real advantages. He ought, therefore, to support it, develop the good in it, and correct its weaknesses. In order to amend administrative bodies, which had grown too complicated, to reconstitute the army, to establish taxes on a new basis, it was necessary to act on public opinion, which was the sovereign of all legislators. Mirabeau makes his appeal for an agreement between public opinion and that of the King, so that "the national party, constituted of the factious and the malcontent, would become the party of the King." When there were thirty-six millions to be employed solely in maintaining the splendour of the throne, when the support of the influence and power of a great National Assembly were to be looked to, there could be, according to him, no other excuse for failure but that of being ill advised and ill served.

Mirabeau, for his part, was determined to give useful advice and loyal service. But of what value were the notes without the animation of his voice, his intonation, his gestures? What could be the use of written communications between men who did not know each other and had never seen each other? The "unhoped-for favours" which the King showered on Mirabeau through the intermediation of the Comte de La Marck had raised his courage. His dignity, his need of confidence, and

perhaps his curiosity desired more. He let it be understood that a secret interview with the King or the Queen would be useful to his plans and their interests. M. de La Marck communicated that idea to M. de Mercy, who in his turn told the Queen. The interview took place on July 3, 1790, at Saint Cloud.

Since the beginning of his negotiations with the Court, Mirabeau had sought rather to come to an understanding with the Queen than with the King. The first lines of his first note were singularly characteristic: "I professed monarchical principles even when I could see only the weakness of the Court, and, knowing nothing of the soul or the mind of the daughter of Maria Theresa, could not count on that august auxiliary." That august auxiliary had been invoked by him to act with regard to La Fayette, and invoked in strange terms! "The King has only one man, his wife. There is no security for her but in the re-establishment of the royal authority. I like to think that she would not wish to live without the crown; but I am very sure that she will not preserve her life if she does not preserve her crown. The moment will come, and soon, when it will be necessary to see what a woman and a child can do in an exodus on horseback; it is a method not unknown in her family!"

Meanwhile, as it was impossible to "find a way out of an extraordinary crisis with the aid of ordinary rules and ordinary means," Mirabeau, once a prisoner in the Château d'If, the fort of Joux, and the Keep of Vincennes, committed for debt, sentenced for rape and seduction, Mirabeau, the elect of the Tiers, the orator of the Revolution, went, on affairs of State, to see King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette!

As he drove along on the morning of July 3 to Saint Cloud, did he remember the words he had used on June 17, 1783, before the Parlement of Aix in his action against his wife? On that day, attracted by the sensational case

and by his name, already famous, the Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, governor of the Milanais, and the Archduchess were present. The Archduke was Marie Antoinette's brother. Mirabeau did not let slip the opportunity for words of homage: "Which of us," he said, "if he wished to find the hallowed image of justice and to embellish it with all the charm of beauty, would not set up the august image of our Queen?"

Almost at the same moment his father, the old Marquis, was, in contrast, writing these curious sentences: "Louis XIV would be greatly astonished if he were to see the wife of his successor in peasant's garb and apron, unattended by pages or any one, running about the palace and the terraces, asking the nearest lackey to give her his hand, and going hand in hand with him down the stairs. Other times, other cares!" Other times, other cares! Rudely dragged back to Paris, guarded, a prisoner, the shepherdess of Trianon was thinking how she could save her family and the kingdom, her crown, her children, her life. Would the man she was expecting, the man she had despised, the man who had treated her with scant respect, be able to point out the way to deliverance and lead her to salvation? The scenes of October 6 when her guards were cut down, her palace was invaded, her person threatened, the mob let loose and howling, rose before her eyes. She could neither rid herself of the memory nor, in spite of everything she had been told, dissociate it from the name of Mirabeau. When she saw him she was filled with horror and terror. She mastered herself, however, and as she talked to him and he, in his caressing voice, told her of his loyalty and respect, his mistakes and his remorse, his intentions and his hopes, she began to discern a generous and warm-hearted man beneath the monster whose proximity she had dreaded. How could she doubt the sincerity and loyalty of one who could speak so? How could she but rely upon a devotion which offered a life

as hostage? Surprised to find such charm and delicacy allied with such tremendous power, she became wholly woman, with all the graces of her irresistible amiability, without forgetting what she owed to her dignity as a Queen. The King on his part was simple, resigned to the necessary sacrifices, conciliatory and trustful. Mirabeau was overcome with emotion, and, according to Mme. Campan, cried as he kissed the Queen's hand: "Madame, the monarchy is saved!" It is impossible to vouch for it, but there can be no doubt that the somewhat romantic mystery of the interview increased Mirabeau's conviction that the royal authority must be restored as quickly as possible if the country were to be retrieved from the abyss towards which it was being hurried.

Unhappily the King was growing more and more incapable of making up his mind or sticking to it. Mirabeau had fixed on the Federation festivities, when delegates from all parts of the kingdom would be assembled, as the most favourable opportunity for associating Louis XVI with the Revolution, and giving the King his rightful place, the first. His advice, which was prudent and easy to follow, was not listened to. He felt it bitterly. After having threatened to use his power for his own ends if he could not find any employment in the public welfare, he resumed his consultations. His notes were sent in one after another, pointing out the means of preparing for a royal journey to Fontainebleau, or suggesting the reorganization, with wise precautions, of the body-guards, or desiring to separate the Swiss from the rest of the army so as to preserve them from a contagion which Mirabeau held to be dangerous to their fidelity.

He had a further opportunity in the tribune of the Assembly of explaining his view of the duties incumbent on the army, the unsettled state of which had been revealed by several incidents. A mutiny had broken out in a regiment at Metz. A few days later a naval officer had

been assassinated at Toulon. The Assembly was inclined to be content with isolated measures. Mirabeau thought it preferable to apply a more systematic remedy to a disease that was unhappily widespread and contagious: "You cannot," he said forcibly, "treat an ulcerated body by dressing one sore after another." He suggested a transfusion of new blood by means of a general dismissal of the troops, followed immediately by an enrolment upon oath of all the officers and soldiers who wished to rejoin the service. The remedy was, perhaps, too bold to be efficacious, but it is worth while to preserve Mirabeau's declarations made during the discussions. "The army does not realize that it cannot exist without severe discipline, that the public peace cannot subsist with an insubordinate army. You cannot dissemble the fact that if the Declaration of the Rights of Man contained principles of no common import, the army could only be sufficiently organized to maintain the public liberty through a declaration of the *duties* of each citizen. Order will not be reestablished until the soldiers have learned that they may not separate their rights from their duty."

These disturbances hardly left him room for hope that a civil war could be avoided. He even asked himself if it might not be a necessary evil. But, he wrote to Mauvillon, "the throne has no ideas, no movement, no will," and he added that the road had never been more beset with traps and ambuscades.

He proceeded along this treacherous ground bravely facing the difficulties which rose up on all sides. The situation was growing graver both at home and abroad. The humanitarian illusions which then obsessed so many minds had not affected his sturdy common sense. At the time of his first speech on the right of war and peace, though he had foreshadowed in the remote future universal Free Trade, uniting Europe into one great family, he had admitted that by changing her political system France had not

forced the other nations to change theirs. He saw that the enthusiasm for liberty could not win over the world as swiftly as certain abstract minds of the Jacobin Society were hoping. He had acknowledged the necessities of his time by inviting the Assembly to renounce war for conquest, but he was not deceived by the "candour" of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre. Universal peace was in his eyes a philosophic dream, to which he refused to sacrifice the interests of a country surrounded by jealous neighbours, and threatened with hostilities: "Though it is commendable to desire such concord, yet, as we seek it not in the meanest of our villages or the smallest of our hamlets, it would be absurd to expect it from the entire world." Also he thought that "inasmuch as the reason of a dishonest man will prevail if he be the stronger, . . . France could not isolate herself without very soon finding the measure of her true greatness in her apparent greatness."

It was from this point of view that, from the outset, he regarded the conflict which the possession of the bay of Nootka in California was about to let loose between England and Spain. We know how insistently, in writings prior to the meeting of the States-General, he had expressed himself in favour of the English alliance. The facts and his own reflections had definitely turned him away from it. With a soberness of thought and expression that are quite remarkable, he observed: "England is rather a commercial than a territorial power. She sees an enemy in any nation which in any fashion whatsoever is likely to restrict her commerce." Moreover, in an unpublished memorandum, he pronounced himself in favour of maintaining the alliance with Spain, even if it were to lead to a war with England. That had for fifty years been the fundamental basis of our traditional policy which had found expression in 1761 in the Family Compact. But these words, which indicated not so much the union of the two

countries as an understanding between the Bourbons, did not ring true in 1790. When, in the spring, there were signs that the dispute between England and Spain was growing acute, Mirabeau understood the danger. Spain called on us to fulfil our pledges, and made it clear that if we refused she would be forced to "seek other friends and allies." The gravity of the threat was accentuated by the hesitation of M. de Montmorin, who, though he could not repudiate our formal obligations, yet shrank from submitting them to an Assembly whose hostility he dreaded. At the very outset Mirabeau indicated the line to be taken. It was clear to him that, the treaty not being national, its ratification would be impossible, whatever he might do. Therefore he proposed to send a negotiator to Spain at once to procure and draw up a revised treaty. With the draft, which would take into account the changes that had taken place in France and of our legitimate susceptibilities, the Assembly could easily be made to choose between a previous alliance, based on commercial advantages, and an isolation that was to be dreaded (June 23).

He returned again and again with increasing urgency to this advice, and he even indicated the men to be chosen for such a delicate mission. Unfortunately, by excluding his Ministers from the confabulations he held with Mirabeau, the King had made the position of his secret adviser very difficult. Mirabeau was constantly impeded by hesitations and contradictions which, through the secrecy of his position, he could not overcome. This "palpitation of attempt and resignation, of half-will and dejection," this "weakness joined to so much audacity," worried and irritated him. Fearful of the possibility of a war in which everything might fall to the ground, a war which he thought as dangerous to the Revolution as to the kingdom, he went so far as to write: "How dare we propose to the King that he should attempt for Spain what he dare not undertake for himself? How can his very existence be

compromised in an undertaking which is not his own?" If only there had been a plan, some determination, some directing idea! He was so alarmed by the confusion at home and abroad that he dared not lay before the King a picture of the "hideous" consequences he foresaw. Ill supported, hardly heeded or understood, he felt that he could only point out a few "details of the pending disaster," and he added in a sorrowful, prophetic tone: "I should be grieved indeed if so good a Prince and a Queen so highly gifted were of no use at all, even through the sacrifice of their consideration and security, in the restoration of their country: indeed, were this so, and myself to be among the first to fall beneath the blade of destiny, I should be a memorable example of what happens to men who, in politics, are too far ahead of their contemporaries."

In the course of this note, which is both powerful and melancholy, he declared that, in the Committee of Foreign Affairs, he would maintain that "we cannot meddle in any affairs other than our own, and that we must seek only to be at peace with whosoever is at peace with us" (August 17).

The Assembly returned to one of Mirabeau's ideas, having deferred its examination until after the discussion on the right of war and peace, and on August 1 appointed a diplomatic committee. It was composed of Mirabeau himself, Barnave, Fréteau, Menou, d'André and Duchâtelet, and was the more completely dominated by the Tribune, as he was the only member who, by his writings, his life and his experience, had been prepared for questions dealing with foreign policy. Being commissioned to report on the demands of Spain, Mirabeau read the committee's memorandum at the sitting of August 25. A witty woman, who, inaccurately, attributed the basis of it to Comte Louis de Ségur, reproached Mirabeau with having "shirked." Stung to the quick, Mirabeau replied,

in a letter to the Comte de La Marck, with a few lines which make no concealment of the fact: "It needs," he said, "more trouble and real cleverness (not genius) to 'shirk' in such a way than to fight: it is perhaps the rarest part of talent, at least in any distinguished talent, because it is the least attractive, and also because it lives on an accumulation of small combinations, privations and services. You can tell the fair Marquise that in politics the public man who has not abandoned all hope of influence, and who considers himself more as a statesman than as an orator or a writer, could have no other course open to him."

Mirabeau rightly judged himself. In him the statesman dominated the orator by the combined boldness and wisdom of his political judgment, by his readiness to bend to difficulties and circumstances, by his wide and ripe knowledge of men, by an almost unique gift of gauging the real importance of events and foreseeing their consequences. His report on the affairs of Spain was a delicate task which demanded infinite tact and subtlety. He had to satisfy Spain while soothing her, to warn England without threatening her, to respect an alliance concluded by the old order apparently in a family interest and to adjust it to accord with the ideas of the Revolution. Mirabeau was not unworthy of the task. Very cleverly he submitted to the Assembly two principles which should result in "fulfilling their engagements without rashness, changing the old system without violence, and avoiding a war without weakness." On the one hand the Assembly declared that treaties previously concluded should be respected by the French nation, and that, on the other, the King should inform the Powers that only purely defensive and commercial stipulations would be recognized. It was not easy to reconcile these two propositions. How were they to be applied to Spain? How were they to substitute for a compact between two Cabinets, made by ambition and

always threatened by realities, a really national compact which would dispose of useless and offensive stipulations, and "in some sort bring the two countries together and form a bond of great interests and mighty efforts?"

Anxiety for the new Constitution, round which it was indispensable to group the whole public force of the State in order to destroy the obstacles which beset it, had dominated the deliberations of the diplomatic committee. But to condemn war in the name of principles was not enough to guarantee against it a nation which had abdicated neither its interests nor its rights. "Why," said Mirabeau, "should the very necessity of assuring peace force the nations to ruin themselves in defensive preparations?" He vowed that such a "frightful policy" should soon be held in horror all the world over, and he held out the prospect of a time when liberty "should absolve the human race of the crime of war and proclaim universal peace." But, having so far contributed to the more or less remote success of a humanitarian philosophy, he added that it could not determine the conduct of France, and he ended with an appeal for the strengthening of the fleet. How many parliamentary debates, since then, have followed the same lines!

The applause was unanimous. The Spanish Government ordered a translation of Mirabeau's speech to be published. But Pitt's diplomacy procured a more effective success. Less than two months later, on October 12, 1790, Spain signed at the Escurial a treaty in which she ceded the bay of Nootka to England and entered into relations with her. Mirabeau was not responsible for this check. The very day after his speech he began to fear the consequences of the skill and activity of the British Government. "Our weakness," he said, "has aided them, and our resolution came so late that we cannot await the reply of Spain without some anxiety." If his advice had been heeded earlier and a cordial understanding with

Spain had been established, England's plans would have been upset and Pitt's project frustrated.

The unrest prevailing in Europe and shaking the Continent to its foundations, had many causes prior to the French Revolution and independent of its influence. But it was inevitable that the Revolution, disturbing the peace of kings and exciting the peoples, should add new elements to the conflicts that were already begun or were imminent. In a prophetic memorandum Mirabeau wrote an often quoted sentence: "Burke has said that France presented nothing but a vast emptiness in politics. Burke has made a very foolish remark, for that emptiness is a volcano, whose subterranean disturbances and proximate eruptions it were rash to ignore." Who could foresee the "incalculable shocks" which that eruption would bring forth? Feeling the necessity of reorganizing the turbulent, disordered and mutinous army, Mirabeau wished to avoid the possibility of war. Peace abroad was no less necessary to the "honour and safety" of the authors of the Revolution than to the threatened monarchy, so long as the Constitution remained incomplete owing to the hatred and mutual suspicion of the various parties. How was peace to be assured? "When a man is wounded," said Mirabeau, "and cannot wield his sword, he must use his shield more carefully, more skilfully, and more swiftly than ever." Never had the shield been more necessary. Difficulties and dangers were crowding in from every side. If the National Assembly, harassed and absorbed by internal events, had, during the first year of its existence, neglected foreign policy, it was now crushed and perturbed by it. The Archbishop of Toulouse had not been alone in discerning that the foreign policy for so long studied and practised by Mirabeau was the Tribune's "strong suit." Even his most violent adversaries did not dispute his superiority here. In all these grave questions, in which the most contradictory interests and ideas were stirred

up, in which it was imperative neither to break with the past nor to go back on the Revolution, in which the supremacy of the people had both to repudiate and to appropriate the maxims and the methods employed by the supremacy of the King, Mirabeau adroitly intervened to produce from the indecision of confused debates the correct solution, the practical means, the formula of conciliation and action. Thus it was that, in the affair of the German Princes in Alsace, he had given his real conclusion, which had been hard to arrive at, on the report of the general committee, presented by Merlin de Douai, the jurist. He had secured the prevalence of the principle of the sovereignty of the nation throughout the French Empire, but only by acknowledging the right of the Princes of the Rhine to an indemnity (October 28, 1790). And again, on November 20, when he "muzzled a voracious Assembly" by a very simple proposition, he put an end to the "philosophical dissertations," dangerous in their consequences, which had been provoked by the situation of the town of Avignon and the county of Venaissin.

But, among all the manifestations in which Mirabeau's foreign policy was shown, I must especially mention his report of January 28, 1791, which is rightly held to be his diplomatic masterpiece. Concise, cautious, and terribly perspicacious, this report is not unworthy of the unanimous success which it received, nor of the reputation which it has retained. Its optimism is only a subtle ingredient added to prepare and secure the measures of preservation which the situation demanded. Italy, Austria, Germany, England are successively considered. What have these countries to gain by an unjust war? If the Revolution gives them reason for fear, are not their very fears the pledge for France of their peaceful intentions?

Mirabeau concentrates his attention on England: she furnishes him with the most elaborate and important passage of his report. According to him Great Britain

must hesitate between two policies: either she could lay down the broad basis of an eternal alliance, or wait upon events to place herself in a position to play a part or perhaps to stir up Europe. Which would she choose? Union or intrigue? She welcomed with enthusiasm the "great charter of humanity found in the ruins of the Bastille." How could she associate herself with a crusade against a people who to gain their liberty and a constitution had only followed her example? But, on the other hand, the growing influence of Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution* over English opinion did not escape Mirabeau's attention. The famous publicist had, with an indignation which flattered the national pride, rejected the alleged similarity between the revolution of 1688 and that of 1789. Far from seeing any flattery in it, he repudiated it as an insult. Except for a few courageous and isolated minds his pamphlet had united the whole nation, which had not forgotten the American war, against France. When Mirabeau tried to separate Burke from the English people it is clear that his tactics outran his convictions. He was not afraid of an open war, for which there was no excuse or object, but his genius divined and denounced the "hidden manœuvres, the secret methods of exciting disunion, playing off parties one against another, stirring up discord, to check our prosperity." It was necessary, then, to watch, "to reckon with the uncertainty of prudence, the tortuous ways of a false policy, and the obscurity which must ever cover a portion of the future."

So the military, diplomatic, and investigatory committees in joint session united in proposing a combination of measures calculated to "reassure the citizens of the country through the foresight of the law," and to extricate the country from the dangers by which it was beset. "Our policy is frank," said Mirabeau, "and we are proud of it; but so long as the conduct of other Governments is

veiled with clouds, who can blame us for taking precautions to maintain peace?" The formula has not grown old. It has been the maxim of all Ministers for Foreign Affairs for a century under all forms of government. On October 12, 1789, Mirabeau inscribed the name of Talleyrand on the ministerial list for Foreign Affairs. It cannot be said that the choice lacked foresight. But his own reports are enough to prove the loftiness of outlook, the competence and skill with which he himself would have discharged these delicate duties. His instinct, or rather his knowledge of his own qualities, did not deceive him when in 1782 he declared his aptitude for a diplomatic career. Perhaps his taste for intrigue sometimes drew him into adventurous negotiations, but respect for national traditions and the application of revolutionary principles were combined in his mind with an easy force and a firm suppleness which, in truth, make it impossible to compare him with any other politician of his own time and country.

But indeed was he not fitted to discharge the duties of any department of Government? Immediately after he had read, in the name of the diplomatic committee, the report on the affairs of Spain, on August 27, he delivered a speech on the liquidation of the public debt, which he revised and developed in the form of a reply at the sitting of September 27. These two speeches are to a large extent the work of his collaborator, the Genevese Reybaz. This has been proved by documents which leave no doubt on the matter. But, as was his custom, Mirabeau inspired the political thought. His thesis varied with circumstances. Whatever the efforts he may have made, even with the aid of inadequately quoted texts, to establish the continuity of his opinions on the question of assignats, he had to admit, if not to a contradiction, at least to the perturbation of an initial doubt which practically amounted to hostility. When, at a remote distance of time, we read again these cold financial dissertations, in which there is none of the

fire of his speech on bankruptcy, it is impossible to convey any understanding of the success they met with, except by finding an explanation in the political interests they served. Mirabeau has been accused of duplicity because, in his notes to the Court, he conveyed an idea of greater confidence than his speeches on the projected operations before the Assembly expressed. An impartial examination of the text does not permit me to join in any such severe judgment. In the tribune he invited his colleagues to do, in the public interest, "what seemed most advisable. We are acting like skilled physicians, if, while taking into consideration all the symptoms of the disease, we nevertheless provide for the most urgent complaint." Was he very widely diverging from these words in saying to the Court: "Is it possible to vouch for the success of the assignats? To that my answer must emphatically be, No. We can vouch for nothing in a kingdom like France, especially in circumstances in which so many different passions and so many prejudices are perpetually in conflict."

His notes and his speeches then both affirm with equal force, not the guaranteed efficacy of the remedy, but the impossibility, without the assignats, of meeting obligations and avoiding bankruptcy.

When, on the meeting of the States-General, he said that "the deficit is the treasure of the nation," Mirabeau laid down a decisive principle. It defined and vindicated the rights which the financial situation would allow the nation to exercise over the monarchy. The assignats seemed to him now to be the "seal of the Revolution," as a means of increasing the number of its defenders, and of making friends of the Constitution of those cold men who, "seeing only in revolutions in government revolutions of fortune," would be interested in defending operations which would place them in the position of creditors and beneficiaries.

With this political end, which should not be condemned on the subsequent excesses for which Mirabeau was not responsible, was combined the desire to overthrow Necker, whose departure would have served both his rancour and his ambitions. From the day when in a violent fit of anger he said to Cerutti: "I will drive your idol out from before the nation . . . I will one day lay his reputation lower than Calonne's, and his fortunes beneath those of Panchaud, . . ." he had never ceased to pursue him with sarcasm, contradiction and attack. The hour of his downfall had at last arrived. Necker, who had been greatly shaken by Mirabeau's first speech on the assignats, did not wait to be asked to retire. On September 4 he sent in his resignation. Mirabeau thought once more that his hour had come. His twenty-sixth note to the Court, dated September 12, insisted again on the necessity of assuring unity of action in the administrative authority by rescinding the decree which made it impossible to take a Ministry from the National Assembly: "The mere presence of Ministers," he said, "would be an intermediary and a bond between powers which is easier to separate in theory than in practice." In favour of this thesis, which accorded with justice, the public interest and true principles, he drew up a line of strategy in which he wished to leave the initiative with the King, so as to give him the moral and political profit of its success. The King listened, approved and promised, but did not act, and Mirabeau's obstinacy, even though seconded by M. de La Marck, could not triumph over his incurable weakness. Mirabeau was no more successful in frustrating the influence of La Fayette, against whom, in his notes, he drew up plans in which his anxiety for public order and the authority of the Crown cannot excuse the violence of certain insults and the meanness of certain intrigues. It is true that his onslaughts were reciprocated. La Fayette was not satisfied with uttering defamatory speeches against Mirabeau,

speeches in which there was more vanity than political sense. It seems that he had failed to fulfil a formal pledge to support Mirabeau in the debate provoked by the inquiry into the events of October 5 and 6. The great orator's adversaries, aided by the partiality of the Commissioners, had waited for this opportunity in the hope of discrediting him. La Fayette had promised to support him. He did not come. Fortunately Mirabeau was quite equal to defending himself.

These proceedings, which had been instituted, or were at least inspired, with the purpose of crushing him, were the cause of one of his greatest successes. He displayed not only magnificent eloquence, but also incomparable presence of mind, self-possession, and lofty scorn. Before the debate was fully opened before the Assembly, numerous incidents occurred which turned to his advantage. As the Right seemed to fear that the revelation of what had passed would cause the flight of those inculpated, he cried: "It is just as probable that the witnesses as that the accused will disappear, and yet the accused are taking no measures to secure that the witnesses do not take to flight."

The arrest of a certain M. de Riolles, a sort of secret agent who worked in the provinces, and who pretended to have had relations with Mirabeau, came near to causing grave doubts. Mirabeau turned this incident to account in an unforeseen argument. He reminded the Assembly that his notoriety, his misdeeds and his services, his misfortunes and his mistakes, had dragged him into all kinds of relations. And with the good-humour of a Titan taking human shape, he added: "My position is so strange: next week, as the Committee gives me to hope, there will be a report of an affair in which I played the part of a factious conspirator; to-day I am accused of being a counter-revolutionary conspirator. Allow me to demand a division. Conspiracy for conspiracy, procedure for procedure,

and, if need be, execution for execution, do at least let me be a revolutionary martyr."

Far from being a martyr, he enjoyed a triumph, and never was triumph more deserved. He was acclaimed by the Left. In the adroitness of his pride he said: "I am not modest enough not to know that in the inquisition into the Revolution I must have a place." The debate of October 2 strengthened his position. Was it the turning-point of his evolution? It has been declared to be so. There is no doubt that Mirabeau approached the Jacobins. But, in judging his conduct, the ordinary standards must not be applied to a man of such rare complexity of character. "The Revolution," he had written to Mauvillon, "may no doubt still disintegrate into anarchy; but it will never fall back in favour of despotism." The whole of Mirabeau is in that sentence. It explains his apparent change of part while he remained faithful to his line of conduct. Anarchy is no more confounded in his mind with the Revolution than despotism with monarchy. Was he a traitor to the Revolution, as fervid spirits have accused him of being, when he denounced the military insurrection at Nancy and passed a vote of thanks to the defenders of law and order? Was he a traitor to the King, as the moderates have reproached him with being, when with fierce indignation he condemned measures in which he discerned a desire to return to the old order? Now on one side, now on the other, he "sturdily maintains the barrier" exposed by his very position to the blows of the extreme parties, and accused of self-contradiction by those whose passions he had refused to flatter or whose interests he would not serve.

In his relations with the Court he too often lacked justice in his attacks on La Fayette and Necker. Hampered by their influence, cramped by their actions, embarrassed by their hostility, he was too apt to see a sacrifice of the public interest in the frustration of his personal ambi-

tions and the obstinacy of his rancour. But he is not always exaggerated in his portraits of his enemies, and his hatred does not always belie his insight. Above all it never obscured his acute sense of the necessities of the general situation. Mounier had said: "Let us never forget that we love the monarchy for France's sake, and not France for the monarchy's." It was for France and the Revolution that Mirabeau loved the monarchy and defended it.

On September 1 he wrote to the King in almost the same terms as he afterwards wrote to Mauvillon: "Despotism is done with for ever in France. The Revolution may prove abortive, the Constitution may be subverted, the Kingdom torn to rags by anarchy, but there will never be one step backwards towards despotism."

On September 3, being anxious about the part La Fayette was trying to play (or was accused of playing) in the events at Nancy, he advised the Court to make itself the mediator between the army and the people.

On September 7 he praised the Assembly (23rd note) for having succeeded, in spite of so many obstacles, in drawing up a Constitution, "the advantages of which outweigh the defects," and at a time when "the laws are rather the work of the people than of their representatives," he congratulated the multitude on having had the wisdom "to regard obedience for the time being as the only possible rallying point of all parties."

On September 12 in a note in which he tried to shake the King's inertia and to enlighten him as to his interests and his duty, he foretold the future with pitiless certainty: "The Assembly will administer more and more: it will govern: and if its efforts are attended with success, if this usurpation of power does not prove distasteful to the people, if so dangerous an example should be followed by other legislatures, monarchical government in France will be weaker than ever."

His conception of a polity consisted in "the alliance

of the principles of representative government with those of monarchical government." Therefore in the Constitution there must be maintained the "conquests common to the nation and the monarch," but there must be cut out of it "the republican ideas which make it a code of anarchy, civil dissensions and resistance to authority." For the necessary revision, which would consolidate the Revolution by protecting it against the consequences of its own mistakes, opinion must be prepared and won over, "changed before being strengthened, supported rather than excited." The Court should adopt a line of conduct which would not allow calumny to spread its poison: it should, frankly and openly, throw in its lot with the popular party, that is to say, with the party which is neither "of the people nor of the aristocracy."

His advice made the greater impression on the Court inasmuch as Mirabeau, in blaming its inaction, did not hesitate to say that its conduct "ought not to consist either in doing nothing or in only allowing the action of injurious persons." He was questioned and invited to state his views more exactly, to say what he meant by the bases of the Constitution and the popular party, to explain how he understood the composition of a new Ministry, the idea of which he had set out more picturesquely than clearly. His answer to these questions was in the note of October 14: he made a bold summary of the ideas scattered through his previous consultations and he offered the Court a real programme of government.

What were the bases of the Constitution? "The ruins of the old Constitution, the great ruins, the downfall of which has flattered the pride of the nation and served its interests." Privileges and pecuniary exemptions, distinctions of class, feudalism, parlements, the orders of the nobility and the clergy, the States and the provincial bodies were abolished for ever. In their stead were established a hereditary sovereign, charged with the execution of the

laws, the administration of the kingdom, the direction of the public powers, and a permanent legislative body periodically elected, to which the adjustment of the laws and the imposition of taxes would be entrusted. The new division of the kingdom, free justice, the liberty of the press, responsibility of Ministers, the sale of the domanial and ecclesiastical estates were intangible measures and reforms which only limited the royal power in order to make it stronger. The Constitution had been built up of rough stones, without a keystone, and in dread of a reaction, with materials proper to a republic and a monarchy alike. It was time, instead of knocking it down, to give it the definite form of a "limited monarchy."

What was the popular party to which the Court was to ally itself? That which desired to maintain the Constitution against the malcontents. The Court should "finally abandon the old magistracy, nobility and clergy," and give them no hope. Its strength would lie in the majority: "If you join that you will acquire the right and the power to direct it, and to direct is to govern." There was no need to be afraid of making the majority more formidable by supporting it. Danger lay rather in distrusting it and so engendering resistance.

So far it is impossible to find a single inconsequence or contradiction in Mirabeau's words. Taking the whole thing, along its main lines, the Tribune's policy is here what it had always been. As M. de La Marck, who did not always approve, though he judged him with great insight, said, "Mirabeau desired the monarchy through the Revolution."

Was it a new thing, was it interested audacity, for him to advise the Court, if the decree of interdiction was removed, to take a part at least of the new Ministers from among the Jacobins? As early as September 7, in a passage which has not been sufficiently commented on, he said: "It is impossible for the club of '89 (composed

of moderates) not to have been for a long time regarded as anti-popular, simply because it cannot gain a success without joining the Right." Could Necker's Ministers, who had survived their leader's departure, follow other principles without incurring a deserved suspicion of hypocrisy? In order to apply the principles of the Revolution to the improved Constitution, it was necessary to appeal to the revolutionaries. Do we not know that "the position of Minister changes a man entirely," and that "Jacobins as Ministers are never Jacobin Ministers. For any man elevation to a great position is a crisis which cures him of the faults he has and gives him others that he has not." In thus reassuring the King, who was being made fearful of extending the republican form to the whole kingdom, Mirabeau showed the depth of his political psychology. Louis XVI's tardiness in acting on his acute advice is no condemnation of it. Since the Revolution how many instances have there not been in the parliamentary system of the wisdom of placing "furious demagogues at the helm of affairs," who have been transformed by experience and responsibility into statesmen? Mirabeau's only mistake was in reproaching La Fayette with "plotting with the leaders of the Jacobins for the success of a plan which the Jacobins had more reason to dread than any one." His hatred led him to blame in others what he himself was advising: only in this can be found the contradiction, of which, quite rightly, complaint is made.

Personally interested, though only through the most legitimate and noble ambition, Mirabeau's hostility towards the Ministers expressed the unanimous feeling of the Assembly and hastened the inevitable condemnation which only their retirement could help them to evade. Neither Champion de Cicé, nor Saint-Priest, nor La Tour du Pin, nor Montmorin was big enough to fulfil the difficult task in which Necker had failed. Had they not "during the six months' storm held aloof and let the ship

of the State go down without touching a single sail or a single rope?" Their indecision had ended in banding against them almost every party. The three committees of the Assembly had resolved to beg the King to form a new Ministry capable of carrying out its decrees. Mirabeau had not been a stranger to this decision which he presented as a "great and fine measure," but he advised the King to anticipate its effect by dismissing his Ministers. He produced the most urgent reasons in favour of such an undertaking, some of which were in conflict with the thesis which he had maintained during the month of July 1789. If there was some vacillation in his Constitutional doctrine, the advice he gave with great insistence was the result of a very wise and far-seeing political outlook. By following this advice the King would have been relieved of errors to which he was no party, and of which he was being made an accomplice. "In times of weakness it should be the policy of governments to yield without seeming to obey." Louis XVI never understood the necessity for such a policy as Mirabeau recommended, and, because he failed to yield in time, he had perpetually to submit to the humiliation of obedience.

Following on a mutiny which had broken out at Brest on board a squadron just returned from the colonies, the diplomatic, colonial, military, and naval committees approached the Assembly with a number of resolutions, the chief of which contained an affirmation of the popular distrust of the Ministry and an order to substitute a flag with the national colours for the white ensign. Although the Ministry had lost the confidence of the Assembly, the orator of the Right, Cazalès, who attacked them roundly, moved the rejection of this proposal on the ground of the royal prerogative. There was only a small majority. Mirabeau took no part in the debate. But he had a nice appreciation of its sense when he said that if the Ministry had won their cause by a nominal majority,

the King had lost his. Once more he advised the King to anticipate the latent temper of the National Assembly and the imperious demands of public opinion by forcing the members of the Government, through an act of royal authority, to retire immediately. His influence with the Court, however, where his word had not yet succeeded in procuring a single energetic act, was even less than usual. A speech which does him honour was the cause of this discredit. At the sitting of October 21 certain members of the Right had attacked the flag with the national colours, and one of them had gone so far as to say: "Leave the new tricoloured toy to children." Upon the provocation of such derision Mirabeau leapt to the tribune. Interrupted by the muttering of the Right, supported and excited by the unanimous applause and enthusiasm of the Left, he delivered a magnificent improvisation in honour of the flag and of liberty, the Constitution and the Revolution. He reminded the Assembly that the supreme chief of the forces of the nation had already ordered the tricolour to be the national ensign. He denounced the white flag as the colour of the anti-revolutionary party, and, addressing the Right, he hurled defiance: "Do not lull yourselves to sleep in perilous security, for the awakening will be soon and terrible!" Recollecting La Fayette's famous words, he gave them forth in a flashing oratorical shape, which electrified the Assembly: "The national colours will be borne over the high seas: they will obtain the respect of every country, not as the emblem of battle and victory, but as the emblem of the holy brotherhood of the friends of liberty throughout the world and as a terror to conspirators and tyrants!"

Was such language really, as the Comte de La Marck and the Archbishop of Toulouse declared, an outburst of his "demagogic instinct"? Was it a contradiction of his secret notes? Had Mirabeau so far departed from his devotion to the Revolution that he had lost the right to

defend its flag? Had he committed sacrilege in asking men on board the vessels of the State to cry: "Long live the nation, the law and the King"? No incident more forcibly reveals the misunderstanding which existed between Mirabeau and the Court. As long ago as the speech in which the Tribune repulsed the accusation of having shared in the events of October, the Queen had written to Mercy-Argenteau, who was abroad upon a mission: "With all his intellect and astuteness, I think he would be hard put to it to prove that he delivered that speech in order to serve us." A strange and unhappy illusion! No. Mirabeau had not accepted the service of the Court against his principles in order to sacrifice the Revolution to the monarchy. The cry which he wished to have uttered on every vessel of the fleet was the affirmation not the negation of the doctrine which, since his profession of faith to Louis XVI, had been expressed in all his notes, all his consultations, all his advice. The King, the law, the nation: he had never had any other device, nor any other programme. When the royalists condemned his speech, they were thinking rather of what they had hoped than of what he had promised. They saw in him rather the defender of royalty than the orator of the Revolution, without seeing that he had never ceased to be both the one and the other. He explained himself with noble indignation, which did not condescend to any detailed explanation: "What!" he wrote to M. de La Marck, "those stupid idiots, drunk with a purely accidental success, offer you a counter-revolution, and you expect me not to protest! Really, my friend, I have no desire to surrender my honour to anybody or my life to the Court! I am a good citizen and I love fame, honour and liberty above all else, and, of course, these retrograde gentry will always find me ready to destroy them! I am devoted to the re-establishment of order, but not to the re-establishment of the old order."

These angry and energetic words atone for many weaknesses. Though he was bound to the Court and paid by it, Mirabeau maintained that he had not sold himself. At first sight the subtlety of the distinction is disconcerting. It becomes comprehensible and almost admissible when we know how Mirabeau had to resist plans which were not his own, and how he refused, even by silence, to betray the noble cause to which he had devoted his genius. "Show my letter," he wrote to the Comte de La Marck, who was hard put to it to explain his attitude. Far from withdrawing, he stuck to his point. Following on the disorder provoked at Belfort by certain officers, which he described as a crime against the nation, he declared: "It is very necessary to teach those who have dared to describe the national colours as a toy that revolutions are not children's games!" (October 30).

His notes to the Court echoed the same opinion. His bold insight did not mince his method of expression. To the King and the Queen he denounced "the priests and nobles, whose inertia when they ought to act and resistance when they ought to give way, have produced all the nation's misfortunes." He declared that their influence would always damage those whom they wished to serve, and he revealed the future in prophetic terms in one of his conclusions: "They are trying to weaken the popular party, but they will only give it new vigour, and by threatening us with a return to despotism, they will end by dragging us, in spite of ourselves, into a Republic. They are malcontents, but not good malcontents!" He was trying to bring the King round to the "useful malcontents," by which he meant well-meaning citizens, attached to order and liberty, who desired no despotism of any kind, and who were equally irritated by the excesses of the Assembly and the resistance of the Court. "If you are to coalesce with them," he said, "you must abandon the society of their enemies, the clergy, the landlords, the parlements, which no one has any desire to defend."

Such advice weakened rather than added to Mirabeau's credit. In spite of its unhappy experiences, the Court persisted in illusions which concealed the truth and the only means of salvation. Louis XVI did not understand, and even if Marie Antoinette had been capable of any concerted plan, she could neither supervise nor assure its execution, since she had no one in the council to represent and aid her. On this point M. de La Marck thought with Mirabeau: "So long as that is so," he wrote to the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, "we shall always fail in the simplest project, or rather we shall be unable to attempt anything."

The real or supposed presence in Paris of Mme. de Lamotte, the intriguing and dangerous heroine of the affair of the necklace, roused Mirabeau's "audacious devotion." The Queen was in danger. Tempted by the chivalrous attitude, he declared that he "would perish at the stake in such an affair and for anything concerning the august and interesting victim who was the object of so many villainous slanders." He expressed himself with a passionate and clear-sighted zeal which won him the gratitude of the Queen and, once more, her confidence. However, the threats and the treachery which he feared were not forthcoming.

Another incident followed, in which it is not so easy to explain his conduct. After the duel in which Charles de Lameth was wounded by M. de Castries, the angry mob burst into the latter's house and sacked it. A debate took place in the Assembly in a heated and excited atmosphere. Mirabeau was touched by the general emotion. There is not a word of condemnation of the outrage to be found in the vehement speech he pronounced. Rather is it excused. Malouet had given up to Mirabeau his turn to speak on condition that he, as likely to obtain a better hearing, would propose and more easily carry the same measures. The violent tone which the Tribune adopted from the outset let loose passion and insult. The Right shouted threats at the

orator. "What would you?" said Mirabeau to Malouet, as he came down from the tribune. "I could not fall into line with people whose only desire is to see me hanged" (November 13).

This "incendiary speech," as M. de La Marck called it, had a great effect on the Queen. Mirabeau was less sure of himself and less proud of his attitude than he had been after the affair of the tricolour, and tried to justify himself: "One has to adopt dissimulation," he said, "when one is trying to outdo force with cunning, just as one has to bend and turn before a storm." It was a halting explanation, and he felt its weakness, for he added that such a principle was opposed to his natural character.

He was nearer the truth when he invoked another maxim. "I must first take the diapason of those whom I wish to bring into harmony with my own." He had lost his own diapason in the Castries affair. Before the Jacobin society of which he had been a member since its foundation and which he had sometimes neglected, though he had never entirely deserted it, he found words more worthy of himself, words which are the more meritorious when we consider the excitement of his audience. He was elected president, and on November 30 delivered a speech in which he declared public order to be "one of the greatest of benefits and the constant support of liberty." As an opponent of all factions, he proclaimed the necessity of making all Frenchmen "enemies of licence and the friends and servants of peace." Such words are enough to justify his having allied himself with a society which was no doubt advanced in its views, though its different periods must not be confounded and it must be remembered that Robespierre's influence only predominated after Mirabeau's death. Without its popularity, without the confidence of the people, Mirabeau's genius would not have suffered him, as he said himself, to plunge successfully into the lists. His relations with the club of the Friends of the

Constitution were necessary for him to be able to act. I do not understand why those relations should have been cast up against him as a contradiction or a backsliding. They were in accordance with the advice he gave to the King: "Whether I be strong or weak in fencing," he said, "I must have a solid footing." He tried to "force the Jacobins insensibly to approach the Court." As Ministers they would have been forced to compromise. The misfortunes of the kingdom, as to which the exercise of power would leave them no illusion, would reveal to them the insufficiency of the royal authority. If they were bidden to consolidate their work, they would feel the necessity of correcting it. It being to their interest to remain faithful to them, their partisans, even while they thought themselves immovable in their opinions, would gradually relax their hold of their principles, and against their will, without knowing it, they would change. Uncompromising morality will call this a Machiavellian scheme having no care for adapting the means to the end. But the political experience of all ages will recognize it as profound psychology and the necessity of handling men through human feelings.

The Jacobins of whom Mirabeau cried: "Name them all! All!" did not become Ministers. But, if the Tribune's desires failed, his prophecies on another point were realized: impotent to hold their ground, Necker's Ministers, who had held out for varying periods, were forced, one by one, to retire. In spite of Mirabeau's efforts their successors were appointed by La Fayette. Not only were the men indicated by the Tribune not chosen, but he bitterly complained that in the formation of the new Ministry there was not a single man in whom he had any confidence, or who could serve as a bond between legitimate authority and those who, like himself, were devoting their energies to defending it. M. de Montmorin, Minister for Foreign Affairs, had alone survived

the general disaster. Mirabeau had only too many reasons for not considering him as an intermediary.

M. de Montmorin, a victim of the general fatality which seemed to hang over all Louis XVI's Ministers, was entirely lacking in character at a time when considered and determined judgment and will were more than ever necessary to make up for the absence of genius in an unparalleled crisis. He was vacillating whenever he had to make up his mind, terrified by the responsibilities of his office, flung this way and that by the violent struggles between opinions and men, and yet, in spite of everything, he was determined to remain a Minister, and with more pliancy than dignity he bent before the changes of attitude which the fluctuations of events demanded of his timorous and uneasy indecision. Attached in the beginning to the fortunes of Necker, he had with haughty and imprudent disdain rejected Mirabeau's proposals. La Fayette's popularity had then attracted him, and, while his colleagues were being shipwrecked on their incapacity, he succeeded in maintaining enough sympathy in the Assembly to procure his formal exclusion from the motion to dismiss the Ministry. This "shameful" exemption had irritated Mirabeau, who saw in the motion a manœuvre on the part of La Fayette. In his notes he had combated it with great vigour, either because of his supposed subordination to the General, or, more plausibly, because of the gravity of the foreign situation. This situation furnished him with the subject for one of those wide surveys in which, as he watched events abroad as well as those at home, he was a past master: "Because we are in a fever," he said, "we think we are possessed of unusual vigour: because we are sick, other nations think we are dying. We and they are mistaken!"

As La Fayette's popularity was visibly on the wane, M. de Montmorin turned towards Mirabeau. He sent and suggested an understanding. Mirabeau, whose relations

with the Court were at the time rather cool, was justly suspicious, and would not pledge himself until he knew the opinion of the Queen, who had never treated the Minister for Foreign Affairs with favour. He informed the Queen of his first conversation with M. de Montmorin. Just as after Mirabeau's death he was miserably to betray these relations to win the confidence of Lameth. M. de Montmorin, in order to win Mirabeau's support, though he had a vague suspicion of his relations with the Court, now deserted La Fayette. On the excuse, in which no doubt there was some sincerity, of saving the King and the nation, but also his own portfolio, by the transfer of authority, he appealed to the Tribune with extravagant praise of his talent and glory. He suggested a coalition to draw up a plan for the Assembly, to supervise the elections, and to restore a certain measure of her popularity to the Queen, whose confidence he counted on Mirabeau to procure for him (December 5). The Queen acquiesced in these proposals. M. de Montmorin's chief anxiety was to obtain from Mirabeau a concerted plan which should exactly determine the means to be employed for the realization of their common aims. Mirabeau set to work, drew up and sent to the Court on December 22 and 23 his forty-seventh note, of which the very title is a programme: *Survey of the situation in France and the means of reconciling the public liberty with the royal authority.*

It is on this, the longest, the most searching, and, all things considered, the most important of all the memoranda he wrote, that Mirabeau's policy is usually judged. It has become Mirabeau's witness before the tribunal of history. The point of view is clear and precisely stated, but it is not by any means exclusive. It must not be forgotten that at the time when he sent this memorandum to the Comte de La Marck, Mirabeau had already been for seven months the adviser of the Court. He had given his opinion, not only on the general situation, which he had

envisaged under its every aspect and in all its consequences, but even on the particular facts which were bound up in it. His advice was not followed. "Being always limited to advice and never allowed to act," he said, "I shall probably meet the fate of Cassandra : I shall always prophesy truly and shall never be believed." These words, which he wrote in a very different situation, exactly fit the welcome which his proposals received at the Court. It would therefore be absolutely unjust to judge his opinions and projects only on a programme which had caused so many vain efforts and such a succession of disappointments. The King's inertia and uncertainty had aggravated the evil for which the sovereign was demanding a remedy of Mirabeau. Already, during the month of May, Mirabeau found that things had been allowed most disastrously to drift from bad to worse. In December he had reason to think that the situation was irreparable. With undaunted courage he clung to his task.

This forty-seventh note was drawn up in a fortnight. It betrays his haste only by an absence of method which constrained the author to repeat himself. He faces the obstacles in the way before fixing the end. There is little risk of falsifying his ideas, which I desire to set forth clearly and soberly, if we begin by first of all establishing what Mirabeau wished to maintain, and what he advised the King to alter, and then determine the obstacles which he dreaded and the means he wished to employ.

The Revolution had given the nation imperishable benefits and irrevocable conquests. "A whole generation would need to perish, twenty-five million men to be robbed of their memory," before it were possible to deprive them of their hopes and the fruits of their efforts. Even an armed counter-revolution could not force the French nation to return to the old order. "The kingdom might be reconquered, but the conqueror would have to compound

with public opinion, make sure of the goodwill of the people, confirm the destruction of old abuses, admit the people to the making of the laws, and allow them to choose their own administrators."

The destruction carried out by the Revolution was almost equally useful to the nation and to the monarch; its consequences must be maintained. By destruction Mirabeau meant, the abolition of all privileges, all pecuniary exemptions, feudalism, the disastrous taxes, the provincial bodies and the States, the parlements, the clergy and the owners of fiefs, in so far as they constituted political bodies. In the same way it was necessary to maintain unity of taxation, the liberty of the press, the freedom of religious opinion, the admissibility of all citizens to all employments, the supervision of the public funds, the equitable dispensation of favours and pecuniary grants. These were the benefits of the Revolution: they were intangible. They were opposed by the nobility and the clergy, who had fallen into such discredit that "if the Court wished to recover some of its influence, it must be very careful to give no ground for an idea that it wished to serve them."

Hence what was needed was not a counter-revolution but a wise and temperate *counter-constitution*. The fundamental principles of the Constitution responded to the will and the needs of the nation, which desired the hereditary kingship with a permanent representative body. These bases were essential and indestructible. But peculiar circumstances had forced on the Assembly a certain deviation from the principles which it had wisely propounded. Thus it had reached a confused mixture of democracy, aristocracy and monarchy. Through fear of the opposition of the malcontents and the resistance of the Court, through fear of a return to the former despotism, it had exaggerated the influence of the people and excessively diminished the authority of the King. "It has not

perceived that it was in this way establishing a kind of democracy without destroying the monarchical government, or that it was making the monarchy useless without establishing a genuine democracy." It had weakened and almost destroyed the executive power, by depriving the King of the rights which should belong to him in the making of the laws, the administration of the kingdom and the use of the public forces. It had multiplied organisms between which there was neither sufficient co-ordination nor interdependence. Therefore every effort must be made to procure a better Constitution which should put every power in its proper place, and by giving each its proper function restore its rights and its means of action.

This programme on all essential points respected the sense of public opinion. Its progressive application would bring back to the Revolution "those who wish for liberty and monarchical government, applaud the National Assembly for having destroyed a number of abuses, and blame it for having disorganized the whole empire, retained for itself all the power and destroyed the royal authority."

But, wise though it was, and perhaps even because it took up a stand between the opposing extremes, this programme would have to face many obstacles. By enumerating them and saying how it was possible to triumph over them, Mirabeau pointed out some of the means of action which he regarded as available.

The boldness with which, in writing to the Court, he noted, among the obstacles to be surmounted, the King's indecision and the measures to be taken to control the Queen, is astonishing. To put an end to the King's indecision he counted on the concert of the Ministers in the Council and the influence of the Queen in his private life. At bottom it is easy to understand that Louis XVI's character seemed to him the most formidable danger, and at the same time that for which it was most difficult to find

MIRABEAU IN 1791

(*From a miniature by J. Lemoine belonging to M. F. Flameng*)

a remedy. Only the Queen had, up to a point, any influence over him. But there was no longer any barrier round the throne, and it was for the throne itself to reassure public opinion as to its intentions, which the factious were distorting and turning into an offensive weapon. A spark might be enough to produce the threatened conflagration. Therefore "the Queen's public conduct must take another course: she must make herself agreeable to the multitude with an enlightened bounty just as her personal charm has won over those who surround her, and the Ministers must associate her with whatever they do to further the Revolution, and invest her with all their popularity."

Mirabeau had wide views, expressed in brilliant passages or picturesque formulæ, of the "frantic demagogy" of Paris, which there was no hope of modifying, though it must be used to detach the provinces from the capital, of the dangers of the National Guard, of the irritability of the Assembly, which was too numerous and had become a sort of theatre, and of the different classes of malcontents. The whole thing forms a gloomy picture, vivid in every detail, while certain portions of it are terribly prophetic.

All these obstacles being either removed, or diminished, or regarded as more proper to be avoided than surmounted, how was the "reformation" of the Constitution to be compassed? Mirabeau repudiated every legislative act that emanated only from the King. Such initiative would hopelessly alienate the mind of the people and would be an irrevocable signal for civil war: "There is nothing to be done, nothing to be attempted, except we are convinced of this truth."

It only remained then to address the Assembly of the representatives of the people. Which? Should the attempt to correct the Constitution be made by the actual Assembly or by the second legislature? Mirabeau did not think it possible to obtain from the existing Assembly the extensive reform he considered necessary, or that its spirit

of abnegation could be expected to go so far as to recognize its own mistakes and to face the sacrifice of popularity entailed by their reparation. Public opinion should be prepared for a change, and "for the return of the torrent which had burst its banks to its bed," it was not desirable to risk the success of the enterprise by a precipitancy which would not allow of adequate and systematic preparations.

But how were they to deal with the existing Assembly? It might rest with itself to make the revision of the constitutional laws impossible for the next Assembly either by decreeing that the Constitution should not be ratified, or by ordering that there should not be a second constituent power until a fixed time. Mirabeau opposed this twofold danger with a plan which can be left unexpounded without injury to his general conception. It was to be feared from the existing Assembly that, by reason of its growing influence, it would so powerfully attach the mind of the people to its work that it could not be modified. In order to lessen this influence Mirabeau suggested a series of measures. First of all, two decrees: one interdicting the re-election of members of the Assembly, and the other, for the forthcoming legislature, forbidding the election of candidates as deputies in departments other than those in which they lived. A second series of measures aimed at provoking dissension among the leaders of the Assembly by deluding them with the hope of being made Ministers after the revocation of the decree of November 7, "and if it was not enough to flatter their ambition in order to seduce them, there were other means, and I have left none unconsidered, which should win more success." Finally, to determine a variation in the thermometer of public opinion, and to provoke its hostility against the Assembly, its path must be trapped, it must be deceived, ruined, made unpopular, and when it has been reduced to impotency, its downfall must suddenly be precipitated. It was not enough to make use of its mistakes: it must be led to

commit mistakes, "influenced to turn its attention towards useless undertakings or unpopular questions: it must be led, without being supported or opposed, to issue every kind of decree which could add to the number of the malcontents . . . it must be embarrassed in its action in order to show its weakness and impotence: excited in its jealousy to rouse that of the administrative bodies; and finally it must be led more and more to usurp every kind of power so as to make its tyranny dreaded." To these general indications, of which I have given the salient features, Mirabeau added detailed plans for separating the provinces from the capital, for exciting the inter-rivalry of the administrative bodies, for provoking popular petitions, for rousing by a bad system of taxation "that kind of blind instinct which has led the people to believe that the Revolution consists in giving them nothing to pay," and finally for organizing a systematic warfare by the King's Ministers on the decrees of the Assembly.

When the Assembly had thus been discredited, weakened and rendered impotent, it must be succeeded by a legislature which, having other views, should have both the power and the will to alter the Constitution. The influence which should be turned in this direction should win over the National Assembly, Paris and the provinces.

In the National Assembly M. de Montmorin would be the central figure of a coalition comprising—for otherwise co-operation would be suspected—MM. de Bonnay, the Abbé de Montesquiou and Cazalès, of the Right, and other deputies of the constitutional group and the popular party: Clermont-Tonnerre, d'André, Duquesnoy, the Bishop of Autun, Emmery, Le Chapelier and Barnave. Only M. de Montmorin and Mirabeau would know of this secret consolidation, and, by most often deceiving the men they employed, would determine their individual action so as to make them contribute to the desired end.

To control Paris Mirabeau suggested the organization of

a police bureau, entrusted to Talon and Semonville, so as to influence the National Guard, the administrative body and the tribunals, the electoral bodies and the sections, public opinion, periodical publications and the tribune of the National Assembly.

To control the provinces an office for correspondence must be instituted, composed of two staffs of travellers, the plan of which was drawn up by Mirabeau with the most precise details of their organization and their methods of action and communication.

Finally, to win over the Assembly, Paris and the Provinces all together, the note indicates how, under the direction of Clermont-Tonnerre, a publishing office was to be started and set in working order.

"There is every hope," says Mirabeau, "if this plan is carried out; if it is not, then any disaster may be looked for." And he ends with a patriotic invocation to the "good but weak King and the unfortunate Queen," whom he was trying to save at the risk of his own ruin.

How are we to judge this famous plan? It is too varied and complex, and it shows too great a divergence between the end and the means to be submitted to an appreciation aiming only at approbation or condemnation. "Unhappy nation!" cried Mirabeau. "A few men who have substituted intrigue for talent and movements for conceptions have led you to this!" Was he not, in his turn, offering the country, in the strangest juxtaposition, talent and intrigue, profound conceptions and doubtful movements? So long as he was exposing the trouble, the anarchy of the kingdom, the conflict of the various Powers, the follies of the Assembly, the dangerous (to public order) weakness of the executive power, he was admirable both in thought and expression. When he pointed out the remedy, and indicated the inalienable conquests of the Revolution and the defects in the Constitution which needed correction, his foresight proved the vast range of his genius. But his

methods of execution were as morally blameworthy as they were practically dubious. His plan of debasing the Assembly, of leading it into disaster, of laying traps for it, was disconcertingly and repellently unscrupulous. Was it excusable, under pretext of fighting intrigue and ambition, to use means which he himself described as "obscure intrigue and artful dissimulation"? Could the salvation of the country depend upon such dangerous weapons placed in the hands of the police in order to discredit an Assembly, divide parties and agitate public opinion? And what lamentable inconsequence! It was Mirabeau who, in an irresistible speech, had caused the rejection of the dangerous proposal to forbid the re-election of deputies. And here he was in a secret note suggesting the idea and advising the Court to act on it! Such advice was not fated to be lost. When, a few days after Mirabeau's death, the Assembly refused to listen to Duport's judicious arguments, and "yielding to the exaggeration of public ideas," and hearkening to the already menacing voice of Robespierre, the Right, encouraged by the Queen, did not fail to fall in with such a stupidly suicidal policy. So it was fated that Mirabeau's advice should only be followed by the Court in one instance, that which, the insight of his genius being obscured, led him to deal the Revolution one of the most terrible blows it suffered!

But could his plan have succeeded? Hardly was it set on foot than it encountered the most serious difficulties. The Ministers had not been informed, but their assistance, inspired and directed by Montmorin, was indispensable. They opposed projects of which they knew nothing. The only result, and that a poor one, was obtained, apparently, by the policy of Talon, who, for a time, created an atmosphere about the Court that was less passionately hostile. The rest did not work or was not even tried. The Comte de Mercy saw at once the weakness of the plan which had roused the Queen to enthusiasm. He recog-

nized its value in theory; but the practical difficulties seemed to him to be insurmountable, "because," he wrote, "it demands the co-operation of men equal in power to him who laid down their plan of action." That was the decisive objection. M. de La Marck shared the feeling. He too had been struck by the "brilliance and profundity" of Mirabeau's projects, but he added: "This plan seems to have been drawn up for other times and other men. Cardinal de Retz, for instance, might have carried it out; but we are no longer living in the days of the Fronde." M. Albert Sorel, who quotes this characteristic appreciation, says that "Mirabeau was not looking back, but forward. When he seemed to combine, in a sort of terrifying resurrection, Père Joseph, Machiavelli and Richelieu, he was simply predicting the consulate of Bonaparte and the Ministry of Fouché!" Now Louis XVI was not Bonaparte and M. de Montmorin was not Fouché. When the King was spoken to about his affairs and position, "it was like talking to him about things relating to the Emperor of China." The reflection is M. de Montmorin's. What force that Minister would have needed to be able to shake such passivity! But he was, on the contrary, timorous, undecided, without will or method. How could Mirabeau hope to succeed with such coadjutors? In a position to act, to direct and supervise everything, he would no doubt have partially succeeded. But his unavowed position and his secret power compelled him to rely on men devoted to intrigue and men of mediocre powers. "We need," he wrote on December 27, "a sort of political pharmacy in which the controller alone, being provided with both simples and poisonous plants, should be able to prescribe his remedies absolutely independent of anything save his own genius and encouraged by the entire confidence of the patient." Nothing could be better than this metaphorical confession for showing the impossibility of an undertaking in which the genius who had conceived it had not reserved

for himself its direction and execution. It was so complicated, and in its execution so contradictory and tortuous, that Mirabeau himself could not escape falling into the traps he had laid. He was the victim of the strange "political pharmacy" he had composed. For some time his action was poisoned and paralyzed by it.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE LAST THREE MONTHS

The application of the ecclesiastical oath : Mirabeau's embarrassment—His Presidency of the National Assembly—"Silence, you thirty!"—The law relating to emigration—The Jacobins' sitting of February 27, 1791—Death of Mirabeau.

It was at the time of the commencement of the civil Constitution of the Clergy that the Court, struck by the contradictions in Mirabeau's attitude, began to suspect him of duplicity. Mirabeau had been silent during the course of the debates which had prepared the way for this perilous undertaking. No doubt he wished neither to compromise his popularity by opposing the Constitution of the Clergy, nor, by supporting it, to estrange the King, whose susceptibility was greater in religious questions than in political questions proper. The National Assembly had made a clumsy mistake in meddling with affairs that did not come within the scope of the civil authority. It was impossible to reproach it with not having exceeded its mandate and with not having anticipated times and manners by decreeing the separation of the two powers. But the civil Constitution which it had drawn up was so violently opposed to ecclesiastical discipline that its execution could not fail to produce conflict and what Edgar Quinet, whose criticism is so exalted, calls "a fury in the dark." Mirabeau contributed to this fury. At the time when he was supporting the suppression of tithes, he had pronounced himself in favour of a salaried clergy. The Assembly had organized a constituted clergy by its decree of June 17, 1790. The Pope, who by this Con-

stitution was robbed of the right to nominate bishops and to delimit the episcopal sees, stirred up a resistance which took shape in the *Exposition of the principles of the civil Constitution of the clergy,* signed by one hundred and thirty-nine bishops. Trouble followed, especially in Brittany, and necessitated the intervention of the Assembly. The Assembly on November 26 was presented with a report by Voidel in the name of the united committees on the alienation of ecclesiastical property.

Mirabeau took part in the debate. He had informed the Comte de La Marck that, to avoid a religious war, he was prepared to accept any "pacific, conciliatory" measure of negotiation. But at the same time he declared that he was "compelled to keep to a certain tone in order to reserve the power of concession," and would deliver a vigorous speech. There certainly was vigour in his speech, and amid theological dissertations which owed much to the competence of the Abbé Lamourette, there was a sort of prejudiced violence against the bishops in the Assembly who had inspired the *Exposition*. Were the measures which Mirabeau proposed more moderate? Throughout there was no mention of anything but forfeitures, and resignations and suppressions of stipends, and prosecutions for crimes against the nation. One provision was especially serious. While the scheme presented by Voidel was only directed towards the ecclesiastics in the exercise of their salaried functions, Mirabeau forbade any priest to administer confession unless he had first of all taken the civic oath before his municipality. This meant the extension to the private acts of free ecclesiastics of the obligations and sanctions which the report of the committees had only recommended in the case of "constituted" priests. However, the Abbé de Pradt, the Bishop of Perpignan, and even M. de Fontanges, before Mirabeau's speech, which they thought detestable, had not been frightened by his proposals. The reason was that, as no date had been fixed

for their execution, these proposals left the way open for delay, discussion and negotiation. But the violence of Mirabeau's speech compromised his tactics, and the Tribune was the victim of his own excessive cleverness. Voidel's plan was carried. It compelled the ecclesiastics without delay to return to their own homes and take the civil oath.

His moderation, concealed beneath aggressive language, not having succeeded, Mirabeau found himself in an awkward position, and remained silent on the ecclesiastical question for several weeks, and did not break out again until the beginning of the year 1791. On January 1, as he gave his consent to a motion by Barnave to assure the execution of the decree of November 27, he tried to explain that the refusal of the oath was incompatible with a public function, but that any priest who refused it would be considered simply as having sent in his resignation without incurring any other sanction. He added that the Assembly had not trenched on the spiritual domain. But on January 4, on the occasion of the disturbances excited in his parish by the curé of Péronne, he secured a series of measures aiming at the facilitation of the election of bishops and curés and the nomination of vicars. In this way he sought to avoid a too long interruption of the ministration of religion, which every wise citizen would regard "as the eclipse of an influence very necessary to the patriotic zeal of the people," and to deprive the enemies of the Revolution of a means of turning public opinion against it by denouncing it as having attacked the "power of their religion, its worship and its hopes."

These two speeches were the expression of a very wise idea which led Mirabeau to seek rather to calm disaffection than to aggravate it, and to facilitate peace rather than to excite hostilities. Were they not thus in contradiction to Mirabeau's plan for urging the necessity and possibility of a remedy through the very excess of the evil? The Comte de La Marck pointed this out to him and amicably

reproached him with not having let the Assembly "fall into the snare." Mirabeau replied that "if the Assembly thought the resignation of twenty thousand curés would have no effect on the kingdom, it must be looking through queer spectacles." Although he had had no part in the deliberations of the ecclesiastical committee he was entrusted with an address to the French nation on the civil Constitution of the clergy, and he read it aloud on January 14. On this occasion he drifted into rather than assumed violence, and expressed himself in a manner which gave such offence to both the Right and to certain members of the majority that he could not finish the reading. It needed nothing less than his admirable report of January 28 on the foreign situation to extricate him from this unfortunate set-back.

M. de La Marck insisted on the execution of that part of the plan which aimed at "undermining" the Assembly, and urged him once more to profit by the question of the clergy to add to the discredit of the legislature. Mirabeau sent two notes to the Court (January 21 and 24) to this intent, and it is impossible to read them without pain. In order to increase the number of the malcontents and to "store up combustible matter for the fire," he suggests a whole series of measures set forth in precise detail. But, by a strange contradiction, in the Assembly he opposed the attitude of the Abbé Maury and Cazalès, who, unconsciously, were in favour of the plan he had drawn up.

Mirabeau's restless incoherence during all these debates is too glaringly in contrast with the serious importance of the religious question not to occasion astonishment and regret. His capacity for intrigue submerged his political instinct just at the very moment when he needed it most. Mirabeau would have done better, if it was impossible for him to have the courage of his convictions, to persist in a silence which would have been less injurious than his speeches to the public service and to his own reputation. He thought and wrote better than he acted:

"Here," he said in a letter of January 27, "is a new sore, the most inflamed and festered of all, which will add yet another gangrene to those which are burning into, corroding and dissolving the body politic. We had made ourselves a King in effigy, without power, and a legislative body which administers, informs, judges, rewards, punishes, does everything but what it ought to do. Now we are setting up religious schism side by side with political schism. We had not enough trouble, but we must rouse more: not enough dangers, but we must evoke the worst of all: not enough difficulties, but we must raise the most insurmountable: we shall bring about the end of all things if the Assembly does not soon grow weary of obeying the anarchists!" There could not be a firmer or more clear-sighted statement of the case. That the same man should have written so noble a letter and should have contradicted it by his conduct, that he should so clearly have foreseen the danger of religious schism and should have contributed to it, is a most disconcerting problem in political psychology. Nothing can solve it except the Marquis de Mirabeau's judgment of his son: "He is all contrasts."

But the part Mirabeau had played in the question of the clergy did not satisfy him. He felt that he had yielded too much to his desire to maintain his popularity, or that he had weakened his attitude by too much subtlety and ill-understood niceties. The courageous good sense which he had shown in his letter prevailed and, on March 2, in a few significant words he expressed the same opinion in the tribune: "The fact is," he said, "we are giving far too much attention to the clergy: we should be concerned with other things now than the question of giving them their pensions and letting them sleep in peace."

At the beginning of the year 1791 Mirabeau's popularity was immense. The people of Paris were grateful for his services and proud of his genius. Mirabeau had become a national glory. The Chaussée d'Antin district, where he

had set up house and lived a recklessly gorgeous life, appointed him on January 18 chief of a battalion of the National Guard. His delight was the greater in that La Fayette had opposed his election. Also he hoped that his office, by giving him "the advantage of going with Monseigneur the Dauphin on his walks," would also give him the advantage of meeting the Queen, with whom he had in vain sought a second interview. He was disappointed in this hope. But the Assembly accorded him an honour which repaired his discomfiture.

Since its convocation it had had forty-two presidents, a few of them famous, some well known, others very mediocre. It was high time to summon to the chair the orator of genius whose fight for liberty had redeemed the errors of a restless and adventurous life. At several junctures Mirabeau had had reason to think he would be elected. At the time of the celebration of the Federation he had been opposed by the umbrageous virtue of La Fayette, who since then had not given him his promised support. Mirabeau's address on the civil Constitution had weakened his chances, which had materially improved. "I don't care a fig," he wrote to the Comte de La Marck with scornful familiarity, but, at heart, he had a very natural desire for the honour. He was elected on January 29, and was an incomparable president. Never had the office been so brilliantly filled or exercised with such genial ease, such sovereign clarity, or such witty impartiality. The speeches he made in answer to the delegations admitted to the bar show a marvellous suppleness of mind and form.

To the composers he delivered an eulogy of music with a lightness and quickness of touch which recalled his little book, *Le Lecteur y mettra le Titre*.

To the municipality of Paris, who protested against the special control of the municipal excise, he replied: "Do not be afraid of the weight of your trials: it is something

gained for liberty." He proclaimed the necessity of public peace and order and of the union of all citizens. And, forgetting the duplicity of the advice he had given in his secret plan, he decried the "intriguing men who were trying to disturb law and order in order to raise themselves to the position of moderators and mediators."

To a deputation of the *Quinze-Vingts* he declared, with the emotion of one whose sight has been impaired, that the Assembly had every sympathy with "the cruel affliction which deprives a man of all the consolations of life and yet falls short of death." He added that a blind man without a leader ought to be a sight unknown among civilized nations. Are there not even now only too many highly civilized nations where such a sight is seen?

To the Quakers, who asked permission to practise their religion in France, and to have their civil status expressed in a particular form, he replied in a speech the prudent courtesy, the political wisdom and high philosophy of which several times provoked the unanimous applause of the Assembly. True, in such speeches Mirabeau was exceeding the bounds of his office. But who would think of reproaching him when he expressed such ingenious and moving thought with such delicacy and force? The Quakers had invoked the article of their religion which forbade them to carry arms or to kill under any pretext whatever. "It is doubtless," he replied, "a fine philosophical principle thus to worship humanity; but consider whether self-defence and the defence of kin and kind is not also a religious duty."

To the lawyers he made a magnificent eulogy of public and private law, "the eternal truths which, based on the nature of man and society, see everything change about them and never change themselves, and are the principle of every lasting regeneration."

If it is true that certain of Mirabeau's enemies had raised him to the presidency in order to set him aside and reduce

him to silence, their doing so served their designs but ill. His tenure of the office was the public revelation of certain qualities of the mighty Tribune which until then had only been appreciated by his intimate friends. His glory gained by it. Circumstances, a few days after he had surrendered the chair to Duport, were to heighten it still more by the heroic resistance which Mirabeau offered to the "anarchists," whose excesses were favoured by a section of the Assembly, a weakly complacent section, who did not share their opinions.

Mirabeau's popularity made M. de La Marck uneasy: "If ever he were to despair of a government," he wrote, "and were to count wholly on his popularity he would be insatiable." The part played by Mirabeau in arranging for M. de La Marck to go to Metz to warn the Marquis de Bouillé of the possibility of the King's departure was enough to allay such anxiety. This plan, of the circumstances of which little is known, came to nothing. It is difficult to say in what form or to what purpose Mirabeau would have facilitated its realization. We can only conclude from it that Mirabeau did not abandon his "wards," as he called the King and Queen. Never had they been in greater need of his guardianship. Unfortunately they sought his advice more than they followed it, and, either from distrust or from weakness, they refrained, especially the King, from their personal share in any action demanding their initiative.

Being warned of a journey to Rome planned by the King's aunts, Mirabeau at once saw and tried to make the Court understand the manifold dangers which false interpretations and the violence of "factions" could bring into being. "If Mesdames were to be brought back," he said, "the commotion might extend even to the palace, and when one lives under a thatched roof it is reasonable to dread both flood and fire." He pledged the King to take the initiative in approaching the Assembly to point out,

that as he dared not, for fear of exceeding his powers, forbid a journey which was obviously inopportune, he expected the deputies to issue a decree defining his rights over the members of his family. Such a step would have given Louis XVI the popularity that Mirabeau expected, but it was too bold not to be distasteful to the King's habitual indecision. Mesdames Adelaide and Victoire left Paris for Rome on February 19, and were first stopped at Moret, and then detained in the Côte d'Or by the municipality of Arnay-le-Duc, whose report, together with a protest by the King's aunts, claiming their rights as "citizenesses," was sent to the Assembly. Mirabeau blamed Mesdames for having done an imprudent and impolitic thing in leaving Paris at a time when all good citizens should stay at their posts near the head of the nation, but he declared that, as the journey was not illegal, there was no reason to discuss it. "Is there a law?" he said. And when he was interrupted with the reply, "There is a law: the safety of the people," he answered with admirable presence of mind: "The safety of the people does not entail the necessity for these ladies to sleep three or four extra nights on the road." His motion was carried (February 24).

On the next day, on the occasion of an incident provoked by Cazalès during the course of a debate on the residence of public functionaries, he uttered some of the strongest words he ever pronounced. He averred that the oath pledged to the nation, the law and the King was indivisible, and that none of its component parts could be separated: "Our oath of fidelity to the King," he declared, "is in the Constitution; it is constitutional. It is profoundly injurious to cast any doubt on our respect for this oath. After such an unequivocal declaration, for which I am prepared to fight the whole world, being determined to fight every kind of faction that may try to undermine the principles of the monarchy, under any system whatsoever, and wherever in the kingdom it may appear"

(the Left applauded loudly); "after such a declaration, which embraces every locality, all times, all systems, all persons, all sects, without wasting more time in vain recriminations, let us pass on to the question which is the order of the day."

Never had Mirabeau expressed himself with more authority. It was the language of a leader conscious of his duty and responsibility. "Take care," he said to Malouet with brutal frankness, "I am the only man in this patriotic horde who could speak thus without a volte-face. I have never adopted their fictions, nor their metaphysics, nor their useless crimes." Through all the incidents that came crowding in, ever more passionate, ever more numerous from day to day, he saw the fixed line, the steadfast barrier which must be maintained if they were to be controlled, their consequences directed, their repetition averted. In his hostility to the counter-revolutionary monarchists and the revolutionary anarchists he regarded them both as factions whose success, in either case, would lead to tyranny. "It was," as Michelet showed in a compelling passage, "a solemn field of battle whereon two principles, two orders of mind, met in combat: one being the original and natural principle which created the Revolution, justice, equitable humanity—and the other being the principle of expediency and interest which called itself the public safety." Between the two systems Mirabeau was aiming at equity.

The debate on the journey of Mesdames had only been an incident, a preparation for the tragic duel. It was the projected decree relating to emigration that brought Mirabeau, already mortally stricken, and the Terror, feeling its way, to grips. In the name of the committee on the Constitution Le Chapelier had prepared a project, but, before reading it, he declared that it would "be injurious to principles and outside the Constitution." At the same time he recognized all the difficulties which would make the applica-

tion of the ordinary law almost impossible. His honesty impelled him to admit the dictatorial nature of what he had drawn up. Dictatorial it certainly was, for, in times of trouble, the Assembly would be able to give to a council of three the right to authorize or forbid passage out of the kingdom.

Mirabeau spoke three times. First of all he read an extract from a letter he had written to Frederick William of Prussia, on the day of that Prince's accession to the throne, in which in the name of eternal equity he denounced as tyrannical any law forbidding emigration. When he had read this letter he asked the Assembly to pass on to the order of the day. The Assembly wished to hear the committee's scheme. As soon as its text was made known Mirabeau rushed to take possession of the tribune. With a firmness of tone which the uproar of a certain thirty members of the Assembly could not shake, he opposed the discussion of a law which could not be enforced. He declared that he would regard himself as released from every oath of fidelity to those who should be infamous enough to appoint a dictatorial committee. It was a challenge. He accentuated the haughtiness of it by the famous words which have done more for his glory as an orator than all his other eloquent speeches: "The popularity which has been my ambition," he cried, "the popularity which, like any other man, I have had the honour to enjoy, is not a frail reed: I wish that it may plunge its roots into the soil down to the unshakable bases of reason and liberty. If you pass a law against emigration I swear that I will never obey it!" The muttering gained in volume. Turning on the extreme Left from whence the uproar came, he silenced them with a sublimely scornful cry: "Silence, you thirty!" His brevity was better than a programme. Outside the mob roared. It was suggested that the proposal for the decree should be sent back to the committee for further consideration: "You may add," he said, "that from this moment until the end of the adjournment there

shall be no disturbance." Thus he made the "thirty voices" responsible for the disorder which had come as far as the very doors of the Assembly. As a member of some weeks' standing of the directing body of the departmental administration of Paris, Mirabeau left the tribune to go straight to this post, to which his duty called him. There he drew up a proclamation which was an echo of the speech he had just delivered: "The authors of these disturbances," he said, "have dishonoured the name of liberty: for liberty does not consist in recognizing no authority: it consists in obeying only such law as has been constitutionally made."

In the evening he went to the Jacobin Club. He had already encountered storms there. On December 6, during a tumultuous meeting, he had called Robespierre to order and respect for the law. When he entered on February 28, the hall was full. Duport and Lameth, who had been silent in the Assembly, were counting on having their revenge on Mirabeau in the over-excited, heated club. Mirabeau knew or suspected as much. With admirable courage he faced the formidable contest, which was made unequal by the passions of a partial audience. His arrival created a sensation. Indignant shouts arose. Without showing any emotion he went to his place and listened and waited. Disconcerted by his unexpected appearance, Duport wandered off into a long speech against La Fayette. At the end of it he denounced those men whom he regarded as most dangerous to liberty: "They are not far away," he said. The anger of the audience, who had only been waiting for this signal, broke out. From every side there came loud applause. All eyes were turned on Mirabeau, and the spectators stood up and shouted and encouraged Duport. He told the story of the morning's sitting: he accused Mirabeau of being the head of a coalition against the Jacobins: he declared that the hopes of the nation and of liberty could never rest upon any one man, and then, in a movement which in fairness he could not but render to

Mirabeau as his due for so many services given to their cause, he appealed to the Tribune to affect a reconciliation in order to defend the public liberty.

Mirabeau walked swiftly to the tribune. He was received with wild uproar, insults, threats. He stood up against them and at last obtained silence. Instead of turning on La Fayette and thus diverting the storm on to his rival's head, he was noble enough and bold enough to defend him and to throw in his lot with him. Then he turned to Duport's bitter words: he powerfully maintained his opinion against the law on emigration, and he loudly reproached his adversaries for not having opposed that opinion in the Assembly, if they thought it so disastrous to liberty. The audience was moved and became almost favourable.

Once more Lameth's speech let loose its fury. Ordinarily a dull and poor speaker, Lameth was stung by hate and spite into surpassing himself. He was skilful and vehement, eager and treacherous. Mirabeau had spoken of the "leaders of opinion." This expression was twisted by Lameth into an insult to all other deputies, whose jealousy, envy and mediocrity he stirred up with deadly fervour. With growing audacity he declared that he was not of those who thought it necessary to spare Mirabeau in order not to drive him to despair. He did not spare him. He dragged forth the mistakes of his youth, his contradictions, his intrigues, his weaknesses, and the equivocal situation that made him at one and the same time the champion of the ideas of Malouet, Cazalès, and the Abbé Maury. The audience was excited almost to delirium.

Mirabeau bore the brunt of this formidable attack without a word or a gesture of interruption. When he got up to reply his hearers displayed an even more violent indignation than they had done after Duport's speech. The president tried to remove the orator from the tribune and to close the meeting. The sight of Mirabeau's "terrible

head," his indomitable and imperious will, his masterful coolness, and possibly also the sort of fascination which physical courage can sometimes exercise over an unbridled mob, triumphed over the revolting partiality of the meeting. Were they to be so stupid and cowardly as to stop the words on the eloquent lips that in each critical hour had spoken the vengeful words which had made or saved the Revolution? The club avoided the shame of such injustice. Mirabeau was heard. What did he say? History knows not. Camille Desmoulins, who reported Lameth's accusation in full, gives only a few lines to Mirabeau's defence. He admits that he spoke with "infinite art," and does not deny his success. That is saying too little. A German, himself a Jacobin, who had no interest in the quarrel, though he does not give us the lines followed by the great orator's reply, leaves no doubt as to the effect he produced. Mirabeau was sublime. Not one of his speeches could come up to the boiling, tumultuous improvisation, in which, denounced, insulted and threatened, he gripped his adversary, and, shaking from his grasp his poisoned weapons, laid him low before an audience that, in spite of all its prejudices, was overwhelmed and acknowledged its defeat by enthusiastic applause. "I will stay among you even though you ostracize me," said Mirabeau, as he ended his speech. He was spared such ostracism by death. After the tragic meeting of the Jacobins he had only four weeks to live.

On March 1, addressing the National Assembly on behalf of a deputation from Paris, he affirmed the necessity of assuring the public peace against "perverse and factious men," whose proceedings he denounced as dangerous to the Constitution. He reminded the people that, having laws and magistrates, they could not take things into their own hands. On being admitted to the King's presence with the same deputation, he declared that "there is no real power save in the union of all the forces of the Empire with one common end, no lasting government save

that in which the law in its execution preserves all the energy of the general will that created it." In such words he was expressing the ideas habitual to his mind. Public order appeared to him more and more to be the condition and safeguard of liberty. But he was not so well inspired in proposing, in favour of twelve hundred poor families, a levy of five days' pay on each deputy. Robespierre rejected the principle. "Every motion," he said, "tending to pervert the salary of the representatives of the nation from its proper destination is an abnegation of the protective principles of public liberty." Democratic truth was on Robespierre's side.

Of Mirabeau's subsequent interventions it is only necessary to note one speech, which was deliberately confused, on the question of the Regency, and two dissertations on the control of mines. This last question, which is arid and difficult, was outside his range. He dealt with it to oblige his friend M. de La Marck, who was personally interested. His two great speeches on this matter, of which the Assembly adopted the conclusions, were drafted by his collaborator Pellenc. Mirabeau read the first at the sitting of March 21, and the second, which he delivered on the 27th, was the occasion of his last appearance in the tribune.

He was already ill, and, worn out by this effort, he took to his bed, never to rise again. The restlessness of his life, his excesses in work and pleasure, had undermined his health and he could hold out no longer. Cabanis, whose cultured and brilliant mind he loved, was under no illusion as to the seriousness of his condition: never had he seen a sick man so obviously stricken with death. He diagnosed his affection as inflammation of the diaphragm. The disease took its usual course, every now and then giving some hope of a cure, hope to which the patient clung more than the physician. The crisis lasted for a week. As soon as it was known, and its danger was suspected, there was a marked change in public opinion.

Since his life had been changed by his relations with the Court, Mirabeau had lived in a house in the Chaussée d'Antin. His door was besieged by an eager mob hungry for news. All sorts and conditions of men met outside. Barnave came with a deputation from the Jacobins. But no one was admitted to see Mirabeau as long as there was any hope of recovery, for he would not run any risk of counteracting the doctor's remedies by excessive emotion. When the great orator felt that all was over he sent for his friends, the Comte de La Marck, Frochot, Pellenc, and his sister, Madame du Saillant, and he talked to them incessantly. On the eve of his death he received Talleyrand, and gave him a speech on the equal division of inheritance in the direct line, which he wished him to read in the tribune. His self-possession was stoical. He was interested in all the news of affairs at home and abroad, and though he could not but know the immense force of which his disappearance from the scene would rob the country, he accepted death with a smiling serenity which showed the fortitude of a rare soul. Death came, after frightful sufferings, on the morning of April 2.

The public emotion showed how exceptional was Mirabeau's position, and how great a popularity his genius and his services had won for him. There was general consternation. The people who, during his illness, had demanded the closing of all the play-houses, absolutely renounced balls and festivities as a provocation and profanation. The department of Paris, the municipality, and many other departments went into mourning. In the name of the department the Duc de la Rochefoucauld in the Assembly deplored the great public calamity, and demanded that the recently-erected church of Saint Geneviève "should be transformed into a burial-place for great men, so that the temple of religion should become the temple of the country, and the tomb of a great man should become the altar of liberty." On a motion by Barnave, which

does honour to his generosity, the Assembly decided that "Mirabeau had deserved the honours which are decreed by the nation for the great men who have served it well."

The obsequies were held on April 4. They were magnificent. From the Chaussée d'Antin to the Church of Saint Eustache and from Saint Eustache to Saint Geneviève there was an unbroken procession. All the authorities, civil and military, took part in it. Three hundred thousand men were gathered together. Windows, balconies, terraces, walls, trees were crowded with people. The rolling of drums and the funeral marches in the darkness of the night took on an even more mournful character and heightened the sorrow of the people, who were throughout quiet and orderly. As the body, borne by twelve sergeants of the regiment of which Mirabeau was commander, passed through the streets there was a mournful silence. The presence of almost the whole Assembly joined the homage of France to the sorrow of Paris. The most eloquent orator of liberty had a royal funeral. His glory overshadowed his faults.

But the "dreadful secrets" with which Marat sullied and threatened his memory, were not buried with him in the tomb. The iron chest in the Tuileries, when opened by the Convention, gave up the incriminating papers. The statue of Mirabeau was veiled. Then, on the motion of M. J. Chénier, the Assembly, "considering that without virtue no man is great," ordered the body of Mirabeau to be removed from the French Panthéon. On September 21, 1794, his remains, contained in a wooden coffin, were laid in the "common burial-ground." They have not been recovered, and it is doubtful if they ever will be. Mirabeau's body is lost, but his memory has ever waxed greater. History, though it does not excuse the mighty orator's weaknesses, salutes in him, as Gambetta said, "the most glorious political genius this country has had since the incomparable Cardinal Richelieu."

# CHAPTER XVI

## MIRABEAU AS A STATESMAN

Programme and method; respect for traditions and the past—Would Mirabeau's plan have succeeded?—The Court's distrust—The first triumph of the Terror.

After Mirabeau's death his contemporaries estimated, if not the whole range of his genius, at least the immensity of the loss the country had suffered. Their testimony is unanimous: "No one," said the Marquis de Ferrières, "dared wield the sceptre that Mirabeau had relinquished. Those who were the most jealous of him seemed the more embarrassed. If there were any important questions all eyes turned mechanically to the place formerly occupied by Mirabeau; it was as though they were inviting him to return to the tribune and waiting, before they formed an opinion, for him to enlighten the Assembly." Mme. de Staël wrote in a similar strain: "The day after his death, no one in the Constituent Assembly could gaze unmoved upon the place where Mirabeau used to sit. The giant oak had fallen, and there was nothing to distinguish all the rest." To such homage from a royalist and the daughter of Necker must be added that of Camille Desmoulins. After having loved Mirabeau "like a mistress," Desmoulins had left him to become the echo of the triumvirate, and had subsequently thrown in his lot with Robespierre. "On the news of his death," he wrote in the *Révolutions de France et de Brabant,* "there fell a stupefying silence for some time on the Assembly. All men were silent before his coffin. It was as though they could not believe that the torch, which for two years had shed such a powerful

light in their midst, was put out. Thus it was that the people who thronged the street round his house, when they knew that half his body was already cold in death, could not accustom themselves to the idea that Mirabeau was mortal."

Such emotion was due to the fascinating power which Mirabeau's eloquence had exercised, to the great memories from which it was inseparable, to the historic scenes which it had animated. But also it was the expression of the profound disappointment which so many abortive hopes had produced. All parties regretted Mirabeau. The dubious side of such unanimity did not escape the malicious vivacity of Camille Desmoulins: "Negroes, monarchists, eightyninists, Jacobins," he wrote, "all honoured him with a funeral oration after their fashion." Had he then flattered and deceived them all? Not at all. He belonged to the party of the Revolution, but in the Revolution he belonged to no party. He had remained faithful to his resolve to bow before no idol, to cringe before no power, only to take up arms for reason and truth, to have no "other judge but Time." Free then from all bond service, conscious of his power and confident in it, he yielded only to the inspirations of his political conscience, scorning the "exchange of opinions and complacent compromise with which a statesman has so often to be content." While the Ministers, caught napping by the Revolution, having neither any general outlook nor directing power, were drifting at the mercy of events and parties, Mirabeau had a definite purpose, a fixed plan, a reasonable sense of the difficulties and their remedies, the end and the means. In his plans he had made room for liberty and authority, royalty and Revolution. Among those who, "lacking instruction and principles, desired a revolution without bounds or tempering," and those who, "having neither good faith nor wit, believed or pretended to believe in the re-establishment of the old system, he represented a deli-

berate, considered and definite Revolution, "though without being envious of time and desiring moderation, gradations and a hierarchy."

To such a programme and method he hoped to rally the men of good faith who in the beginning had not wished for the Revolution, but understood that it was an accomplished fact, and wished to circumscribe it only in order to consolidate it. He wished the King, who alone was qualified for the position, to be at once the head and the moderator of the new system. The existence of a strong armed executive power seemed to him to be, not only the essential condition of public order, but also the guarantee of liberty. To apply the principles declared in 1789, to maintain and develop them, to fight in their name against despotism and anarchy, he felt that a government was needful. It was the corner-stone of the plan he had been pondering ever since the convocation of the States-General, and the master idea which, since that time, had dominated all his speeches and all his actions. Camille Desmoulins was not mistaken. Whatever the irritation he felt about the discussion on the right of peace and war, he recognized that, through all those perilous days, Mirabeau had been for the executive power, and that he had always been opposed to the curtailment of the ministerial power. "We must be just," he added. "This observation is in his favour, since it makes his opinion of May 22 the consequence of a logical system."

This system was a stumbling-block alike to those who, as partisans of absolutism, did not understand that the royal power could only survive in a moderated and limited form, and to those who, through weakness or intrigue, desired no bounds to be set to the omnipotence of the Assembly. Mirabeau was attached to a middle policy, and strove, in spite of every obstacle, to reconcile the royal authority and the national liberty. When he defended liberty the extreme revolutionaries acclaimed him. When

he supported authority they accused him of having gone over to the adversaries of the Revolution. Camille Desmoulins reproached him with his "ubiquity." And, indeed, to judge by appearances, Mirabeau seems to have been everywhere and nowhere. On his death, each party, recollecting only that element of the Tribune's policy which sorted with its interests or its passions, laid claim to him. But, at heart, Mirabeau belonged to himself alone, and had never consented to any partition of himself. He did not carry with him to his tomb the secret and the riddle of his policy. The policy which he advised the Court to adopt in his secret consultations had twenty times been publicly expressed. He detested a certain kind of finesse, which had always been repulsive to his robust nature. "It is possible to go on aping skill, but never force." And he was of the race of the strong.

He preferred the lessons of experience and the reality of facts to "philosophic discussions" and "laboured doctrines." Unlike Sieyès, he was not a "citizen philosopher," but a politician and a man, and he declared that "it is not always convenient to consult only the right without taking circumstances into account." The metaphysician and the statesman do not proceed along the same lines and do not aim at the same goal. The one journeys over a chart of the world and is never impeded by obstacles. The other marches across the earth, where he has constantly to face danger of all kinds. Antecedents were of no less account to Mirabeau than principles. He had a feeling for tradition, which he tried both at home and abroad to bring into line with the new order of things. He said that "a people that had grown old amid anti-social institutions could not adapt itself to pure philosophical principles." Principles are as immutable as eternity, but the passage of time opposes to them interests, pretensions, and prejudices of which only ignorance or rashness could refuse to admit the existence. Mirabeau never con-

founded politics with "romance." As a man of action, endeavouring to translate his ideal into actuality, he neglected neither the force of things nor the passions of men. The fiery orator was a mighty realist; nothing but a caprice of fate denied the part, in the transition from Richelieu to Bonaparte, which was fitting to his genius, that was hardly at all inferior to theirs.

He was conscious of being big enough to face every difficulty and to defy Pitt, "to whom he would have given much trouble," no less than the anarchists, whose audacity he had denounced. What truth there might be in Burke's pamphlet did not apply to him. The Constituent Assembly had yielded less than is supposed by a certain historical school to philosophical abstractions, and the practical work it did was immense. But, by proclaiming the "Rights of Man" it had offended the national and traditional feeling of the English, which was interpreted by the bitter irony of Burke: "We have always desired," said Burke, "to derive what we possess from the past, as an heritage bequeathed to us by our ancestors. We demand our franchise not as the rights of man, but as the rights of Englishmen. . . . We are determined to maintain an Established Church, an established monarchy, an established aristocracy, an established democracy, each according to its existing degree and no more." These blunt affirmations might fairly be opposed to certain theories of Rousseau, but Mirabeau had certainly never incurred any such reproach. Did he not seem to be answering Burke and refuting him in anticipation when he contrasted with the "savages of the Orinoco" the government, King and prejudices pre-existing in France before the Revolution? In his eyes "abruptness of the transition" was the greatest danger. As he wrote to the Bailli, "the period of transition between two revolutions is always worse than the position that has been abandoned, however oppressive it may have been." Therefore to come successfully through

such a period he clung to everything that had a "handle" and a "hold." "Anything will serve," he declared, "events, men, things, opinions."

And yet he did assign to the past the part which can never be refused it without rashness: he wished the new régime to be surrounded with sure, faithful men who would understand and love it. The time for personal favours was gone: "It is no longer a matter of giving creatures to the Ministers, but of giving Ministers to the King," and by the King, Mirabeau meant the Revolution as well as the monarch. For diplomatic appointments he demanded agents "whose former prejudices would not be inimical to their duty," and who "would not compromise the power of France by doubts as to her success." Far from disregarding youth, he pinned his faith to it. When the question arose of sending a negotiator to Madrid to alter the Family Compact, he did not hesitate to recommend a young man, and a new man, to the Court, "for, indeed, it is time to form new men and to bind them to us. Now, nothing forms youth so much as great affairs, which force it into self-restraint, and nothing is so binding, and that is worth something, as a great mark of confidence."

Thus prepared, attended and armed for the fight, what would Mirabeau have done? Would his plan have succeeded, or did he die at the right moment for his fame? Historians are divided on this question. For my part, I have no hesitation in thinking that during the spring of 1791 events would have brutally and irreparably upset his plans. Not that, intrinsically, they were absolutely outside practical politics, or that the whole of his contradictory and complex scheme was condemned to failure; but, for an even partial success, Mirabeau's personal activity, his motive force, his constant direction, his continual supervision, were absolutely necessary. Limited as he was to the obscure position of secret adviser, he had therefore neither the sympathy, nor the esteem, nor the confidence

of those whom he was advising. As a secret Minister he would not have played an ineffective part if his advice had been followed. Unfortunately he was consulted but never heeded. The evidence of Fersen may be quoted as proving this point. Fersen wrote to the King of Sweden: "Mirabeau is still paid by the Court and working on its behalf; but he now has not as much scope for doing good as he had for doing harm. . . . In spite of that it is worth while not to have him against us. All he does serves but to produce a little order and peace and to assure the safety of the royal family, but they will never be of use for any other purpose."

This admission, which is the more valuable because of its intimacy, reveals the intentions of the Court. Marie Antoinette may at one time have believed that Mirabeau was destined to play a different part. She was not in the deplorable state of mind with regard to him that is shown in her letter of August 26, 1791, to the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau: "It is impossible to go on living like this: the only thing we can do is to bemuse them and give them confidence in us, so as to trick them the more effectively later on." She did not wish to "trick" Mirabeau. It was to her that Mirabeau addressed his memoranda, from her that he expected the motive force and the "definite decisions" to overcome the King's indecision. But she had neither the application nor the power of concentration for any consecutive thought. As for the King he remained the "inert creature" who so distressed M. de La Marck. Far from giving Mirabeau his "entire confidence," as he had promised La Fayette in writing in April 1790, he regarded him as a salaried servant, of whom he used to speak with contempt. He turned elsewhere for his real inspiration and the advice he followed. He had ended by being convinced, as Fersen shows, that he would never be King "without foreign assistance which would overpower even his own supporters." On the eve of Mirabeau's death the

plan of leaving Paris was settled : it was not the plan which Mirabeau had advised. Mirabeau had recommended a public departure in the open day, in full confidence in the people, to whom the King should appeal "without begging for outside support." But "under no circumstances, upon no excuse, would he be the confidant or the accomplice in anything like an 'escape.'" If such an escape were to be attempted, he had declared his determination to "denounce the monarch himself." But since he had addressed the Comte de Provence in such vigorous terms in the memorandum of October 15, 1789, though he had not changed his opinion, he had, by his treaty with the King, condemned himself to silence. After the flight of Louis XVI and his arrest at Varennes, how could he have denounced his departure without exposing himself to the publication by the Court—which, by discrediting him, would hope to discredit the Revolution—of the notes he had sent and the sums of money he had received? No doubt, by sending, in July 1790, the manuscripts of these notes to the Comte de La Marck so that his friend might defend his memory, he flattered himself that he was leaving him "noble material for an apology," and such confidence certainly shows the loftiness of his intentions. But it is highly improbable that the revolutionaries, his companions in the fight, being at grips with the resistance and dissimulation of the King, would have appreciated such an apology with the impartiality of posterity, and in such a case there would not have been emptiness in the cry through the streets of the capital of "High Treason of the Comte de Mirabeau." Deserted and abandoned by the Court, could Mirabeau turn against it in the Assembly without making shipwreck on the feelings, aggravated and exasperated by certain proof, which he had found it so hard to override at the time of the first meeting of the States-General? This time the reproach of venality would not have rested on vague indications and uncertain presumptions. Would it have been enough for

DEATH MASK OF MIRABEAU

*(From a contemporary drawing in the Paul Arbaud collection at Aix)*

Mirabeau to protest, as he had told Malouet some months before, that he had not, by defending the legal and tutelary authority of the monarch, deserted the struggle for liberty and the fight against tyranny? His huge voice would have been powerless to rise above the consequent uproar, and his stormy life would have ended, as a pitiful and lamentable adventure, in the jealousy of one party, the hatred of the other, and the contempt of all.

Death, which overtook him on April 2, 1791, granted him, instead of such a tragic fall, the supreme favour of an unforgettable apotheosis, which caused a whole grateful and stricken people to bow their heads in grief before his bier. Such compensation for the injustice of his fate came, alas, too late! Mirabeau did not leave in the memory of men the glory that he had dreamed. Regarding himself and wishing to be rather "a statesman than an orator," he hated the idea that he had only contributed to a "vast demolition." After having taken a larger share than any other man, through the brilliance of his pen and the power of his speeches, in the abolition of the old order, he was filled with the noble ambition to build up the new order on the basis of reason, liberty and justice, and had worked out the whole plan and drawn up the details of its execution in his mind. He felt that the Revolution would only be lasting and definite if it could replace what it had destroyed, and would consent to apply itself to such a task. When he died, it was already too late!

Camille Desmoulins distinguishes in Mirabeau, the Tribune, whom he admired, and the Consul, whose plans he feared. The time for a "Consul" had not yet come. But would it ever have come if, in November 1789, Mirabeau had been Minister? He lacked his opportunity. Fate withheld it from him. If he had been called to the Ministry then, not only would his fate have been different, but it is not too much to say that the destinies of the country would have been changed. What Mirabeau, the

secret adviser of the Court, could not accomplish at the time of his death, Mirabeau, the responsible Minister, would have attempted eighteen months earlier, and would no doubt have succeeded in doing. By reconciling the Monarchy and the Revolution, the authority of the King and the liberty of the nation, the principles of 1789 and the prerogatives of the executive power; by making "the royal power the patrimony of the people," he would have spared France the Terror, Cæsarism, and invasion. He would have advanced by a quarter of a century the definite establishment of the political conquests of the Revolution. M. Jaurès hails him as "the only man who raises in the mind a hypothesis which can for a moment weigh with reality." Before M. Jaurès, Proudhon had given this hypothesis the force of a compelling logic and a moving justification which cannot but be accepted by any man who, having perceived and understood the genius of Mirabeau, realizes the power of his ideas, his tremendous perspicacity, his sense of reality, his knowledge of men, and the variety of the resources which his supple skill was capable of bringing to the service of a long-pondered and clear-cut scheme. Mirabeau had every quality necessary for playing such a game and winning—general culture and familiarity with practical affairs, talent and audacity, skill and force, passion and self-possession, conviction and courage, and also that desire for a personal rehabilitation which accorded well with the national reconstruction of which he hoped to be the architect. Without making any essential change in the general lines of the programme which he subsequently offered to the Court, he would have aimed at its realization, by other means more worthy of himself, and, it must be said, of the Revolution. The tribune would have taken the place of the proposed police. There, in open debate, in the conflict of interests and parties, no man, in hours of crisis, could withstand him. In November 1789, where were the thirty voices that in February 1791 he silenced

with his superb contempt? And, after his magnificent reply during the discussion on the right of peace and war, what became of men like Lameth, who were crushed by a scornful allusion to their past as courtiers? What became of Barnave himself, who only the day before had enjoyed a triumph? Lanjuinais was not mistaken when he spoke of the influence that Mirabeau as a Minister would have exercised over the Assembly. He would have been its master. But the gain would have been as great for the country as for Mirabeau. The decree of November 7 broke the only power which could consolidate the Revolution by moderating it. It was on that day really, and not on the day of Mirabeau's death, that "the ruins of the monarchy became the prey of faction," and Revolution by way of the Terror won its first victory over Revolution by way of Law.

## CHAPTER XVII

### MIRABEAU AS AN ORATOR

The problem of collaboration: Reybaz and Dumont — Mirabeau's methods of work—The origins of his eloquence—Mirabeau in the tribune: his wit, his imagination—Conclusion.

THE *Souvenirs sur Mirabeau* of Étienne Dumont, published in 1832, made a real impression. The share which the author took to himself in the great orator's speeches and addresses, and the share which he acknowledged as belonging to his Genevese compatriots, were the subject of passionate discussions. Jules Janin wrathfully denounced it as a profanation and a lie. With heated irritation and force he condemned such "banal accusations and stupid recriminations." Goethe in a conversation with Eckermann was more cool and just: "Mirabeau," he said, "who was a miracle, is becoming a natural human being, but the hero loses none of his greatness thereby. He possessed the gift of discerning talent, and talent was attracted by the dominant quality of his mighty nature and was glad to submit to him and his direction. So he was surrounded with a number of men of remarkable intelligence, whom he filled with his fire, and set moving by directing them towards the lofty goal at which he aimed. To act with others and through others was precisely the quality of his genius, his originality and his greatness."

In these characteristic words Goethe may be said to have pronounced a final judgment on the various and numerous collaborations which Mirabeau employed in the course of his labours. We can only be astonished at the excitement caused by Dumont's revelations if we remember that they

merely stated definitely what had already been written and said during the Revolution. Mme. Roland, Mme. de Staël, the Marquis de Ferrières, the Duc de Lévis and Chateaubriand, leave no doubt on the subject. Immediately after the death of the tribune, Camille Desmoulins wrote in his own picturesque fashion: "Every one knows that, after the manner of the actors in the Roman theatre, of whom there were always two for each part, one for declamation and the other for gesture, M. de Mirabeau always reserved gesture for himself and relied for the sound on another person hidden behind the scenes." Dumont's *Souvenirs* had partly raised the back-cloth. A book published in 1874 by M. Ph. Plan, under the title of *Un collaborateur de Mirabeau,* is full of unpublished documents which make it possible to penetrate further into the secret of the collaborations on which Mirabeau relied.

A pastor of the reformed Church, a tutor in various noble families, and, later, a citizen of Geneva, Reybaz had, during his first visit to France, known some of the famous men of the time, particularly Voltaire, who appreciated the quality of his mind, which was literary, scientific and philosophical. Having taken part in the inner struggles of his city in the cause of such truth and justice as his conscience as an honest man imposed on him, Reybaz took refuge in Paris, where he extended the range of his culture, which was already wide and profound. Three of his compatriots, Clavière, Duroveray, and Dumont, who had all been working for a more or less considerable time for Mirabeau, tried in August or September 1789 to bring him into touch with the already famous tribune. Being distrustful and a rigid moralist Reybaz declined. Mirabeau tried all the more to win him over, and, with a respect and formality which were not very usual with him, neglected no attention which might attract him and procure his alliance. With his usual swift and sure

insight he had appreciated the assistance to be derived from such a highly developed talent which was equally apt with pen and speech. In the month of January 1790 there began between him and Reybaz a correspondence and relationship which only ended with the death of Mirabeau. The oratorical gifts of Reybaz are proved by the simple fact that, when in 1794 he was appointed representative of Geneva in Paris, and presented his letters of credence to the Convention, he delivered a speech which was so successful that the Assembly ordered its translation into all languages. With admirable art Mirabeau utilized the resources of this superior man. The letters which he wrote to him, now in the Library at Geneva with the rough drafts prepared by Reybaz, make it possible for us to attribute to the Genevese pastor the almost exclusive authorship of a speech, which was never delivered, though it was almost completed, in favour of the marriage of priests, and the entire composition of the speech which Talleyrand read after the death of Mirabeau and in accordance with his wishes, on the equal division of inheritance in the direct line.

But the published documents do not allow us to stop there, and Reybaz must be credited with other orations, read by Mirabeau in the tribune, which contributed largely to his reputation: for instance, the celebrated speech of August 27, 1790, on assignats. We can have no room for doubt if we follow the correspondence between Mirabeau and Reybaz and the indications given by the orator to his "factor," and especially if we read this passage from a note he wrote to him after the triumphant sitting: "I send you all the compliments I have received on the excellent speech you gave me." Does that mean that Mirabeau had, to adopt Camille Desmoulins' expression, only contributed the gesture and delivery? His letter shows that he had added "a few pages and altered a few words which should stand in the printed copy." The real

matter of the speech is therefore certainly due to Reybaz. Mirabeau, on the other hand, had no intention of losing the advantage of his success, and he wrote to his collaborator: "N.B. Follow the *Moniteurs* carefully so that we can be ready for a reply." The reply was delivered on September 27. In the interval Mirabeau was busy stirring up the zeal of his collaborator, suggesting ideas, arguments, developments, sending him documents and instructions, and especially urging on him the importance of justifying him against the reproach of self-contradiction, which, not inaccurately, had been levelled against him. Although the question was not yet in the order of the day, he wrote to him on September 10, "Please send me a fair copy as soon as possible so that I may be well up in the matter."

On other occasions Mirabeau would ask for variations, which, in the form of marginal notes, would give him room to alter the text to fit the moment of his participation in the discussion. He did this for a speech, which, however, circumstances did not allow him to deliver, in reply to Lavenue's proposal to tax incomes. Although Reybaz had been working for a whole month on this speech, on his behalf and according to his instructions, Mirabeau placed himself at the disposal of the Committee, on any day at any hour, saying that he was ready. "Or rather that he had no need of preparation." Clearly he was not lacking in audacity.

With skilful flattery and delicious cajolery he made Reybaz work at every kind of subject: the death penalty and criminal reform, public education, the relations of the executive power and the administrative power, the organization of the National Guard, the law of adoption, and of extradition. From all these demands, which prove the breadth of his preoccupation and the encyclopædic power of his correspondent, we must insist on the exceptional interest which Mirabeau attached to the institution of a scheme of national education, "the sheet anchor of the

Revolution," as he said, "and after the liberty of the press, the only palladium of public liberty."

All these documents, by establishing the important part played by Reybaz in Mirabeau's speeches, have, at the same time, strikingly confirmed the assertions, formerly so hotly disputed, of Étienne Dumont. A very learned man, safe in his judgment, a collaborator of Bentham, and a remarkable publicist, Dumont rendered Mirabeau services which are beyond dispute. Are all the speeches and addresses of which he claims the authorship in his *Souvenirs* to be attributed to him? Many of them, and some of the most famous, such as the speech of July 8, 1789, on the dismissal of the troops, must be; Dumont's good faith is undoubted, but the inexactitude of his assertions, which has been proven on certain points, shows how difficult and even how impossible it is to define the precise extent of the collaborations by which Mirabeau profited. I will give only one example. In the *Souvenirs* Dumont declares himself to be the author of the noble and vivid address which followed the speech on the dismissal of the troops, and he provides some curious details of the circumstances of the preparation of that address. On the other hand, if we open the *Histoire de l'Assemblée Constituante* by Alexandre Lameth, who was no friend of Mirabeau, we find the author saying, "As a member of the publishing committee, I saw almost the whole of this famous address. . . . M. Dumont is to be credited with having combined feelings of moderation with ideas of convenience. As for the passionate eloquence which breathes forth from this truly national allocution, that must infallibly be credited to Mirabeau."

That being so, apart from the few exceptions which allow of more exactness, all we can do is to draw up a list of the journeymen employed by Mirabeau in what he called his "workshop." By the side of Reybaz and Dumont a slightly lower place must be made for Duroveray,

but it is impossible to exaggerate the part played by Pellenc: as Mirabeau's secretary, Pellenc was, by his varied accomplishments, the chief collaborator of the Tribune who used his remarkable intelligence and resources in numerous important works. The list is completed by various occasional correspondents like the Abbé Lamourette in the work relating to the civil Constitution of the clergy: the Englishman, Clarkson, for a speech read to the Jacobins against the trade in negroes: Clavière for questions relating to the Caisse d'Escompte; a French Consul in the East, Peyssonnel, for certain diplomatic business; an adviser to the Cour des Monnaies of Nancy, M. Beyerlé, for the re-casting of the system of coinage.

Not all the speeches prepared by these collaborators were delivered; many of them were found unpublished among Mirabeau's papers They show how right Goethe was in praising his special genius for acting with and through others. Chamfort said that Mirabeau was the flint without which he could not fire his gun. This "flint" possessed a sovereign magic. When it was broken many of the lights it had lit were of no use or account: Mme. de Staël very justly observes that after Mirabeau's death not one of his friends "could have written what he had inspired in them."

Mirabeau did really inspire his collaborators. He used to explain to them, more or less at length, sometimes with a general plan, sometimes with detailed ideas, what he expected of them. When he asked Reybaz for a reply on the subject of assignats, he laid down the "three heads" under which that reply was to be arranged. A few days later a particular set of circumstances suggested the idea of a parallel between the life of the speculator and that of the agriculturist, and the necessity for a "paragraph to please Paris." He apologized for increasing the task with flattering words to which Reybaz could not remain insensible. "Oh!" he said, "who but you could so brilliantly incor-

porate such an intercalation in your magnificent work? *Vale et me ama.*" When the debate on the Regency seemed to him to be becoming dangerous to the monarchy and he felt the necessity for intervening, he sent for Pellenc, whom he said he had inoculated with his doctrine, and he proposed to take him into the country "to bring all their forces to bear on it." Through the Comte de La Marck he gave him his instructions: "That he should most closely and in detail examine the decree and pick out everything that was dangerous to public liberty, consider it from every point of view, take notes only, but develop them sufficiently for me to speak from them easily and fluently." That last sentence contains a precious indication of Mirabeau's oratorical method. He has often been denied a certain gift of moving freely in political discussions outside his prepared speech. This is clearly mistaken, or, if you prefer it, exaggerated. He used often to read: and he even complained one day to Reybaz that "though his secretary's handwriting was very charming, it was a little minute for the tribune." But often he used to speak "easily and fluently," either from notes that had been prepared for him, or, according to the testimony of Arthur Young, without the help of a single note. In dealing with the driest subjects he used to assimilate the information supplied him so completely as to be as much in possession of his subject as though he had studied it himself. The speeches on mines were, as I have said, the work of Pellenc, but no objection caught Mirabeau unready, and he replied with marvellous exactness to every question put to him during the debate.

On the other hand he used to reshape most carefully the speeches of which he had suggested the general lines and the essential details. Being very scrupulous in diction, he used to cut and chisel the sentences: he excelled in giving the vivacity of his oratorical charm to the rather dogmatic dissertations of his Genevese friends who were

too faithful to their old habit of preaching. Having a musical ear he knew the value of words: he was not ignorant of the fact that sometimes it only needed the transposition of a few words to transform a sentence and give it harmony and rhythm. Did he not apologize to Reybaz for a "*bien* which he omitted in delivery"? Sometimes, it is true, he made changes of a different kind. He would interpolate developments and new ideas. He used to impress his originality and his mark on the impersonal work of others. What Dumont says of his method as a writer is equally true of his method as an orator. "When he had his basis and his materials, he used to prune, and compress, and give the whole more force and life, and impress on it the moving quality of his eloquence. He used to call this putting the polish on a piece of work. This polish would be an odd expression, an image, a sally, an epigram, a stroke of irony, an allusion, some vivid, striking phrase which he thought absolutely necessary to sustain attention."

In this way Mirabeau made the work of others his own. But without his collaborators he could not have proved equal to the overwhelming task imposed on him by his reputation. In the new world being constructed day by day by the Constituent Assembly, all kinds of questions cropped up. Mirabeau was never at a loss, never indifferent to any of them. Every debate attracted him. No other orator possessed so wide a range of competence or so great an authority. Even those who were prevented from respecting him by his past, his actual life, and their own invincible prejudices, could not refuse to acknowledge his almost universal competence, his clear-sightedness, his good sense, which was as courageous as it was luminous. The remark he made about Sieyès: "His silence is a public calamity," was more true of himself than of the theorizing Abbé, whose power of action was exhausted in a few happy and decisive formulæ. In that Assembly which had

barred his access to the Ministry, the need of his words, his directions, his advice, was constantly felt. How could Mirabeau have avoided it? And how could he alone have coped with the necessities of the most copious and fluid mass of business that ever weighed upon a legislative body? He was always, to use his own picturesque expression, "on the tripod." He also said: "We are altogether deprived of time to think and ponder: it has become almost impossible for us to organize any big piece of work, even when we have all the materials ready." Add to all this his vast personal correspondence, the notes he drafted for the Court and the time devoted to his pleasures, and there need be no surprise that he should have called in the aid of collaborators. They were absolutely necessary to him. He never repudiated them. And those whom he employed were proud to contribute to his glory. It seemed to them, as Dumont said, that they were introducing their obscure children into an illustrious family. And sometimes they were hard put to it to recognize these children. In this respect the famous phrase of Cicero has often been quoted: "When Sulpicius has to speak on the art of war, he has to call in the help of the science of Marius; but when he hears him speak, Marius will be tempted to think that Sulpicius knows more of war than himself." Mirabeau needed many a Marius. But Clavière and Reybaz admired him when he spoke on finance, and Dumont when he argued on public law, Lamourette when he quoted the Oecumenical Councils, Pellenc when he held forth on mines. All of them admitted his superiority in the special subjects in which they had instructed him. When he had "thoroughly learned the matter" they had prepared, he showed himself their master. But above all they hailed in him a real force and spontaneity of genius which never belonged to Sulpicius.

It was when he owed nothing to anybody that Mirabeau rose above himself and was really incomparable. His

improvisations, in which he poured all the ardour of his fiery soul, flung down torrents of flame into the Assembly. Then he would put his whole soul into his words, and become tumultuous, vibrant and pathetic, scornful and menacing, impetuous and ironical, without ever losing his self-possession amid the passions he let loose, and roused or appeased at his will. He would overpower his hearers, overwhelm their rancour, reduce to silence all impatient jealousy and rival ambitions. All were subjugated and spellbound. According to Barnave, no man of his time could approach him, and no orator, ancient or modern, has ever surpassed the force and beauty of his talent.

Whence came the talent and how was it formed? The Marquis de Mirabeau said that all his family inherited from the Glandèves "a certain exuberance of nature." From the time when he was ten years old the boy Gabriel revealed his descent by a habit of "speechifying," which his father describes. At nineteen the Marquis used to reprove his son for his lies, but he used to add that they were almost "convincing in their eloquent impudence." At Saintes his personal charm and the power of his words had, in spite of scandal, "divided the town and the province between him and reason." At twenty-two Mirabeau disconcerted his uncle with his "head stuffed full of lofty thoughts, ardour, fortitude and glory. . . . When he really takes up a thing," said the Bailli, "he bends down his head and looks at nothing else. . . . If he can only be got to talk sense, Cicero will be a fool to him." At Pierre-Buffière, where he founded the *Conseil des prud'hommes,* Mirabeau revealed a "suppleness, a roundness and an activity" which astonished his father. Eight years later the Marquis spurned his son's "horrible talent" and his "skill in finding the means to carry conviction." The tragic plaint which came from the Keep of Vincennes did not move him: he said of the prisoner that "pathos came as natural to him as coursing to a greyhound." With the

acuteness of hatred he discovered all that was reminiscent and borrowed in his talent, while its originality escaped him.

It was at Vincennes, during his forty months of imprisonment and solitude, that Mirabeau, protected from despair by work, shaped his genius. Not only did his intellectual voracity absorb everything, but the writer prepared the way for the tribune. Sainte-Beuve was almost the first to remark that the *Letters written from Vincennes* are filled with the "involuntary movements, exclamations, and gestures of the orator." Suddenly ceasing to address Sophie, Mirabeau appeals to an ideal audience, which he calls to witness and judge his misfortunes and his ideas. "In vain is the orator caged: he rises, strides about, and his silent cell reverberates with his eloquence." I have tried elsewhere to reveal the force and varied eloquence which Mirabeau displayed in the memoranda addressed to his father, to M. de Maurepas and M. Lenoir. They are wonderful passages of oratory, composed as pleadings, to be spoken, ranging from bitter, biting irony to the most mournfully pathetic tone. On the approach of his liberation Mirabeau wrote to his uncle, on December 25, 1779, a curious, breathlessly eloquent letter in which he declares his contempt for the greater number of positive laws, and, without denying his mistakes and misdeeds, tried to explain them. He had won his father's forgiveness, but he will not, he says, "plead with gratitude," and, addressing the Bailli, he adds: "That is practically how I should venture to defend my case before your tribunal." And it is in fact to a tribunal with open doors and crowded with people that he seems to address himself. His voice is heard, he is no longer writing, he pleads, speaks, attacks: "If those who accuse me were of good faith they would not oppose my using every means for a legitimate defence: they would not have had me condemned to the silence of the dead, who, at least, are not persecuted: they would not have concealed my very

existence and all knowledge of my fate from the whole world: in a word, they would not have had so much temerity, suspicion and fear, if they had not been ashamed of the part they have played. Let my enemies appear openly, and not attack me from the shelter of their offices! Have the laws no force in my country? Is the sovereign no longer our guardian and protector? Are not the magistrates adequate to condemn or absolve me? . . ." His letter of defence continues in this strain, vehement and precise, bold, urgent and proud. It is the forerunner of the vigorous memoranda produced before the tribunal of Pontarlier and prepares the way for the admirable speeches which were to move and astonish the Court at Aix.

As the result of that famous case the orator stood revealed to himself and was impressed upon the minds of others. Unconsciously he went on preparing himself, disciplining his talent, by a constant gymnastic, for the part that destiny held in store for him. As a publicist and pamphleteer he produced innumerable addresses, denunciations, brochures, replies. He became the advocate of the financiers or their opponents, he defended the Jews and the Batavians: he accused one set of men, protected another, was everywhere: his father admitted that there was "character even in his impudence," and that he had "learned how to use words as an instrument." After the letter to the Dutch refugees, he admitted that Mirabeau had made himself "a strong and very powerful political tribunal." During the campaign in Provence, the incidents of which he followed with interest, he spoke of the "miraculous orator," ironically, no doubt, but suddenly he seemed to have a prevision of the immortal sitting which would plunge his son into the fight and glory: "He will do things which will imply the immunity of the States-General: in that case he will be a very great personage."

His apostrophe of Dreux-Brézé made Mirabeau a personage. It created the Mirabeau legend. It seems im-

possible to imagine him otherwise than with his leonine head thrown back, his arm stretched out in defiance and menace, with his voice imperiously resounding, driving back before the will of the people the monarchy, already conquered by the boldness of triumphant right. Indeed, the legend, as so often happens, only differs from historical fact in degree. In this case it is not so much a deformation as an accretion. Mirabeau's physical equipment was a part of his eloquence. The orator astonished and dominated the audience even before he spoke. He would stride swiftly to the tribune. Of Herculean build, broad-shouldered, his massive head crowned with a thick mass of hair which was always carefully arranged, Mirabeau gave an immediate impression of power. His face, pitted with small-pox, was ugly, but his very ugliness, transformed by the play of his countenance, was marvellously turned into a source of power. When he shook his "terrible boar's head" he was terrifying, and no man dared to interrupt him. His eyes, in which Chateaubriand saw pride, vice and genius, darted lightnings. But when he "softened" them in a certain way they had an irresistible fascination. His voice, which was musical and tuneful, was a no less compelling instrument. He could modulate it with infinite skill, now sweet and caressing, now bursting forth like thunder which in its furious peal shook the Assembly. Except for a few flashing outbreaks, his opening was generally painful, awkward, embarrassed. He seemed to hesitate with his words like a man trying to bear a burden too heavy for him. Even in action his delivery was noble and imposing in spite of his passionate intonation. He used to articulate so clearly that nothing was lost, and every sound could be heard, even in the farthest corner of that vast assembly. At the outset of his career it was felt that his declamation was a little emphatic, and savoured too much of the actor's art. But his charm soon made itself felt and carried all before it. His hearers were delighted that he

spoke and read so well. No one, not even Talleyrand, who was a marvellous speaker, could approach him, and the speech on inheritance, with which Mirabeau had won a great success with the Jacobins, was quite a different thing when read by the Bishop of Autun. Mirabeau was animated in gesture, but he never made the tribune seem a cage from which he was struggling to break free. He was solemn rather than excited. His self-possession was amazing. When he read his speech on the denomination of the Communes, he was speaking almost for the first time, but he had complete control of himself: insults, imprecations, threats were hurled at him: he was quite impassive. As he left the tribune he turned to the President and solemnly declared: "I submit to your office the fragment which has excited so much protest and has been so misunderstood. I am willing that its contents should be judged by all the friends of liberty." During the debate on the disturbances at Marseilles, the Right interrupted his speech with cries of slanderer, liar, scoundrel, assassin. He stopped for a moment and looked at the excited members who were bespattering him with their vile words: "I am waiting, gentlemen," he said, "for these amenities to die down." Then he went on with his speech at the point where he had broken off.

He was less apt in the cut and thrust of the tribune than Barnave, whose facility in improvisation of general ideas and dialectical capacity he lacked. His method of work and the manifold nature of the questions he embraced precluded any prolonged reflection or any profound knowledge of the details of his subject. If he were called upon for an immediate refutation, he was liable to be caught unprepared. "I see," he said to Dumont, "that if I am to improvise a speech on a question I must first of all know it thoroughly." He did not always know his subject. The Abbé Maury discovered this weakness and on several occasions twitted him on it with exasperating malignity.

Mirabeau therefore detested him, while he respected the serious uprightness of Cazalès. But it was as well not to provoke the Tribune too far, for a terrible retort might make up for the failure of an argument. Barnave himself had a cruel experience of this. In discussing a proposal of Mirabeau's relating to the graduation of employment, he made so bold as to rally him on the subject of the suggested delay of ten years in preparing for its introduction. Mirabeau was infuriated, and cried: "The last speaker seems to forget that, if rhetoricians speak for twenty-four hours, legislators speak for all time."

In any discussion he was extraordinarily ready in seizing on the weak point of his opponent's argument and he was equally swift and clear in discovering the Assembly's state of mind. In him the power of the orator was allied with the skill of the tactician. He knew how to yield at the right moment, or how, with a well-chosen phrase, to end a debate and polish off his adversary with a dexterous stroke.

He would gather up the reflections or allusions he heard and make them his own by endowing them with a brilliance and force that transformed them. In a reply to Barnave, he began his speech with a piquant attack: "I have long maintained that facility is one of the fairest gifts of nature, but only on condition that it be not abused: what I have just heard has not led me to change my opinion." He had never maintained anything of the kind, but in his exordium he employed a phrase of Chamfort's, with whom he had just been talking. The magnificent simile of the Capitol and the Tarpeian Rock, with which he thrilled the Assembly, was suggested to him by a saying of Volney's or Rivarol's, which he happened to hear as he was mounting the tribune: "Well, Mirabeau! yesterday at the Capitol, to-day on the Tarpeian Rock!" There was nothing, not even "Silence, you thirty!" that was not inspired by reflections made by others before him.

D'André when President had answered a too urgent demand of Charles Lameth's with: "I cannot, sir, subject the Assembly to the power of thirty of its members." Out of this courteous, gently spoken observation Mirabeau had fashioned a sublime and tragic cry, the imperious brutality of which contained a whole policy and was worth a whole speech.

He was vehement in his indignation, but he also had wit of every kind. He answered d'Epresmenil, who insisted on invoking the Salic law: "I too demand the right to speak on the Salic law, and I promise not even to ask to have it laid before me." Once, when he was interrupted by a voice saying: "You are nothing but a windbag," he turned to the President: "Monsieur le Président, I ask you to suppress the interrupter who called me a windbag." In repudiating any share in the disturbances of October, he tempered the bitter eloquence of his ardent and magnificent speech with good humour. He had been accused of making his way through the ranks of the Flanders regiment, sabre in hand. He had been confused with M. Gamaches: "So, when all is weighed and examined," he said, "M. Valfond's deposition contains nothing serious, except for M. Gamaches, who is legally and vehemently suspected of being very ugly, since he is like myself." M. Virieux had boasted of having received certain compromising admissions from him: "M. Virieux is a strange man! Did he ever show himself to be so sincere a friend of the existing Constitution, that a man who has been accused of everything, except stupidity, should have chosen him as his confidant?" During the debate on the ecclesiastical oath, when he spoke of the spiritual aspect, the Right muttered protest: "I beg that part of the Assembly which is interrupting me," he said, "to observe that I have no designs on a Bishopric." After a speech by the Abbé Maury: "I have had some difficulty in guessing whether the last speaker ascended the tribune for his own or for our

pleasure." When the question of the Regency was being discussed and it seemed as though the oath of loyalty to the Constitution would be imposed on the future regent, M. de Montlosier observed that particular circumstances, such as a journey across the seas, might prevent its being taken: "I am afraid the last speaker is mistaken," observed Mirabeau, "he spoke of a journey across the seas; perhaps he meant to say a journey across the Rhine." This allusion to the emigration had the success it deserved.

These are aspects of Mirabeau's eloquence which must not be neglected, but his genius as an orator lay elsewhere, it consisted in power rather than finesse, in passion rather than in wit. He was essentially vehement, and did not always avoid declamation. Mirabeau had no creative imagination. His speeches do not contain the comparisons and contrasts, so striking in their novelty, which make Bossuet a great poet. The images he used were commonplace. He compares bankruptcy to a gulf or an abyss, and where he reaches beauty he does so through movement and action and not through imagery.

On the other hand he was gifted with what we may call historical imagination. He excelled in resuscitating the facts of the past and flinging them, tingling with life, into the debate to enlighten it, impassion it, or hasten its end. To the nobility of Provence, who expelled him from their midst, he opposed the vengeful memory of Marius. To the delegation sent to procure from the King the dismissal of the troops, he recalled the generous and subtle kindness of Henry IV who, when he was besieging Paris, allowed provisions to be carried into the city. When Louis XVI hesitated about giving his support to the Declaration of the Rights of Man proclaimed by the Assembly, Mirabeau, in order to reconcile his twofold respect for the national sovereignty and the royal authority, conveyed a warning in a historical reminiscence: "It seems to me," he declared, "that the King might be addressed

with the frankness and truth which a fool of Philip's expressed in these trivial words, 'What would you do, Philip, if everybody said No when you said Yes?'" When Maury made a rash attack on the rights of the Assembly, Mirabeau, quoting with singular felicity the famous saying of Cicero, praised it for having saved the Commonwealth.

And never did he more forcibly and more happily use this power of reminiscence than in the debate raised by the unforeseen motion of Dom Gerle. The Jacobin Carthusian, in a sudden and rash inspiration, had demanded that the Catholic religion should be proclaimed the national religion. Violent passions were let loose, which could not be tamed even by a declaration from La Rochefoucauld, who invited the Assembly not to debate the motion but to proclaim its attachment to the Catholic faith, which it had made a first charge on the public funds. There was tremendous confusion and tumult, which was suddenly ended by Mirabeau. A deputy reminded the Assembly that Louis XIV at Cambrai had promised never to tolerate the Protestant faith in that town, and he demanded that the promise should be carried out. Mirabeau rose to protest against "such an act of despotism, which could not be taken as a precedent for the representatives of a free people." Then in superb tones he went on: "Since we have admitted historical quotations in relation to the matter before us, I will give you one. You will remember, gentlemen, that from here, from the tribune where I am speaking, I can see the windows of the palace where factious men, combining their own temporal interests with the most sacred interests of religion, caused the feeble hand of a King of the French to discharge the fatal arquebus which gave the signal for the massacre of Saint Bartholomew." Stupefied and appalled, a profound silence descended on the Assembly, then applause and acclamation greeted the still quivering Mirabeau. It was one of

his greatest triumphs. A few days later when Roederer congratulated him and observed that he had been guilty of exaggeration, since he could not possibly see the Louvre from the tribune, Mirabeau replied, "Now I come to think of it, that is so. But in that moment of inspiration I saw what I said I saw." Nothing more clearly than this reply reveals the force and spontaneity of his genius as an orator. One day he said to Barnave: "There is no divinity in you." He himself was the equal of the greatest, because the divinity had visited and inspired him.

He loved life passionately and exhausted all its delights; but also, not so much from pride and from nobility of soul, he worshipped his fame, which he entrusted to the future. He was content to wait for his rehabilitation at the hands of time, "that incorruptible judge who grants justice to all," and of impartial history. The scandals of his youth, and the failings of his maturity had forbidden his giving the full measure of his power. He suffered from his impotence as from a wrong done to the national interests. "Oh!" he said to Cabanis, "if I had brought to the Revolution a reputation equal to that of Malesherbes! What a mighty destiny I would have assured for my country! What glory I should have attached to my name!" He was not mistaken in his presentiment. He left a great name, which is lit up with a legendary glamour, but his destiny was inferior to his genius.

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